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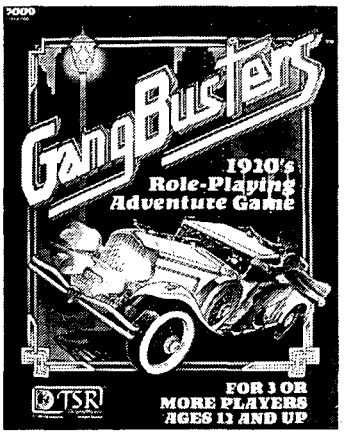
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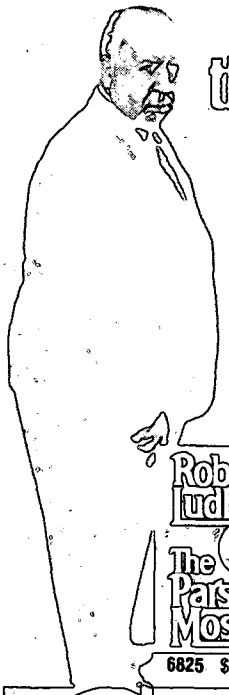
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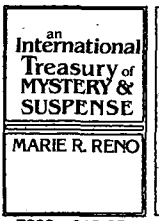
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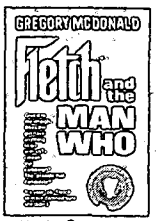
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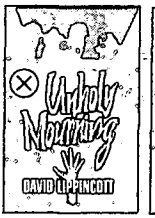
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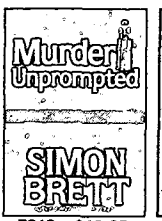
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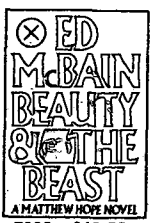
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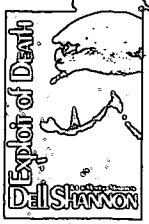
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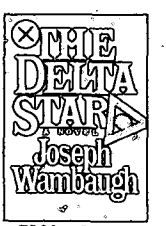
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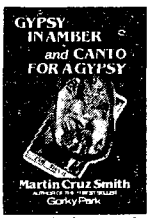
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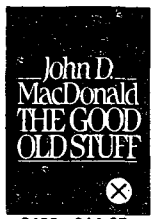
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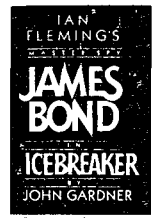
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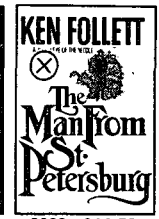
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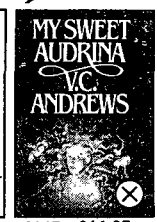
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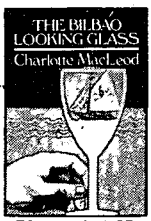
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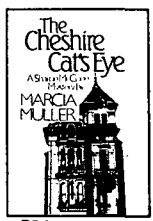
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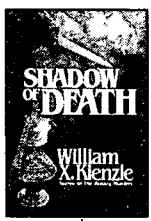
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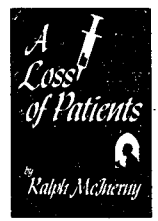
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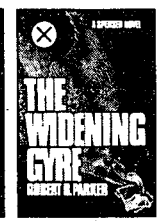
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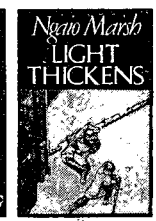
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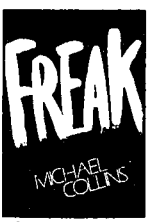
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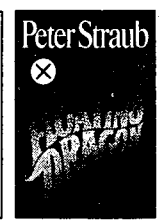
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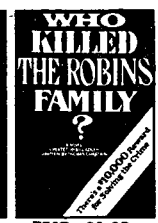
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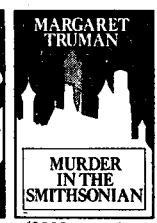
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

It has been a long time since the one-armed detective Dan Fortune graced the pages of AHMM—since, in fact, August of 1972, in the story "Who?"—and we are glad to have him back, especially in the delightful and thoroughly indescribable tale that is our cover story. In the meantime, however, Michael Collins has kept him busy in a series of novels about him, eleven of them to date, of which the latest, *Freak,* was published this year by Dodd, Mead.

Collins (real name: Dennis Lynds) now lives in California but comes from New York, and knows well the Chelsea haunts of his detective. He received the 1967 Edgar Award for Best First Novel for *Act of Fear,* his first Dan Fortune adventure, and is currently at work on a new book, planned for publication in 1984.

We are also particularly glad to include in this issue a story by mystery novelist Doris Miles Disney, one called "Vacation Trip." A second story, "Afternoon Drive," will appear in AHMM next month. These two stories were among Mrs. Disney's papers when she died in 1976 and have never before been published. We are grateful to her daughter, Elizabeth Laing, for making them available to us; they are Mrs. Disney's only short stories.

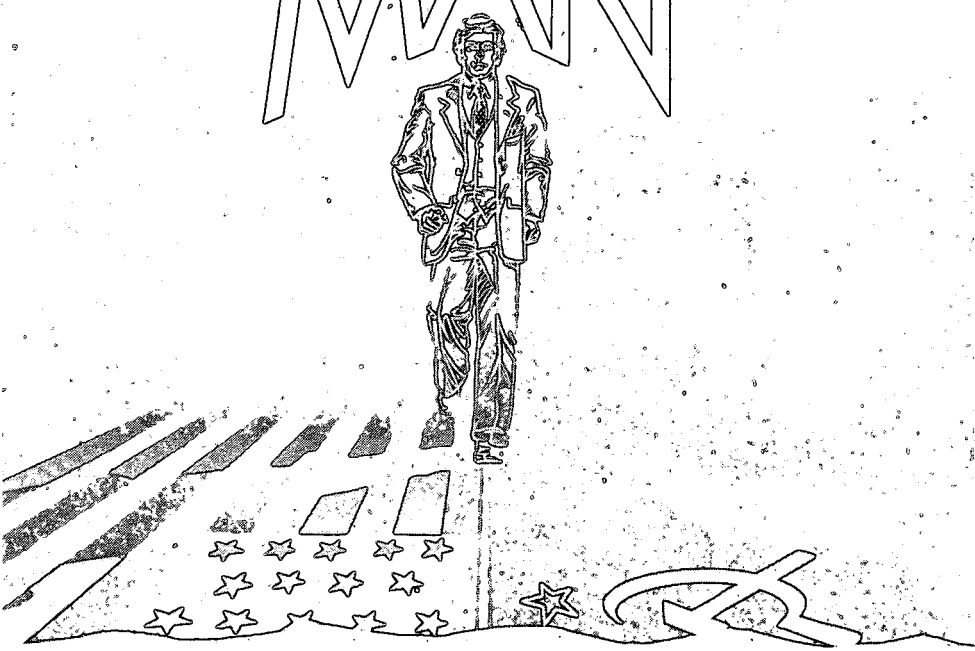
Mrs. Disney was, of course, the author of many mystery novels, nearly all of them published by Doubleday's Crime Club, beginning in 1943. Several—*Family Skeleton, Straw Man,* and *Dark Road*—were made into movies; others—for example, *Do Not Fold, Spindle, or Mutilate* and *Night of Clear Choice*—became television films (the latter as *Yesterday's Child).*

"Vacation Trip" is a chilling little story, in more ways than one, and quite different from "Dan Fortune and the Hollywood Caper." The remaining stories in this issue are equally varied. James Holding is back with "Never Wake a Sleeping Man," set in Hong Kong. Those readers who have been with us for a while will know that Holding often writes of far away places—always of ones he knows from his own travels around the world, though these days, he tells us, he spends his time swimming in the Gulf of Mexico a hundred yards from his Florida home and playing golf. And speaking of golf, there's James

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A. Noble's story of one (evidently dangerous) side of *that* world, at least as it's pursued by the foursome involved in "The Case of the Untidy Golf Cult."

Ron Butler takes us back to Okayama, where Sam Brent and Inspector Ueki get mixed up in the goings-on in "The Blush-Pink Room," and two new authors, Bruce Dettman and Michael Bedford, in their first published story, spin terror out of—of all places—a laundromat. The Mystery Classic, F. Tennyson Jesse's "Treasure Trove"—in an appropriately autumnal story, involves us with the mystery of an unearthed treasure of sorts on an English farm.

Nor is that all. But enough, perhaps, to go on with—and if you like a puzzle to keep thinking of after the stories are all read, there's the continuing mystery, in Cases on File, of the unknown tsar, unsolved since the early seventeenth century, in Robert L. Plumb's account. (For another of Plumb's Russian mysteries, see the January, 1983, issue of AHMM for "The Missing Romanov Tomb.") It all, we hope, adds up to a satisfying collection for a cold autumn night.

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Dan FORTUNE and the HOLLYWOOD Caper



Illustration by Ray Lago

by Michael Collins

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"Someone tried to shoot me," Isabelle Kucera said. "Isn't it wonderful?"

Isabelle is a file clerk in a midtown office where everyone sits in front of a CRT screen all day and feeds a computer. She works nine to five and half a day on Saturday. This was Saturday, we were in my one room loft overlooking Eighth Avenue, and she had come to hire me.

"No one ever tried to *shoot* me before!" she said happily. "I know it's Grace Kelly, Danny. Grace Kelly never lets John Ireland go."

Isabelle is also a thousand old movies walking around. Like a lot of slum kids left alone in a six flight walk-up while her mother worked, Isabelle grew up in front of a television set. Later she branched out into the rerun movie houses in Chelsea and the Village. Only she doesn't leave the movies inside the TV set or the rerun house. She lives them.

"He's a hired killer, like Alan Ladd," Isabelle said, her eyes shining. "Grace Kelly hired him to kill me, and you can track him down, Danny, just like Elliot Gould."

Once, after a movie in which Ingrid Bergman was a noble nun in China, Isabelle tried to join a missionary order. The nuns were nice about it. When she was thirteen, the city sent her to summer camp. She had to be dragged to her seat on the bus. She was Bonita Granville being sent off to a Nazi concentration camp. Now that she's twenty-six, blonde, and beautiful, she's the woman who ruins John Ireland.

"This time I know it's going to work out, Danny!" she glowed. "Pauli really is John Ireland!"

She doesn't mean the real John Ireland, she means the roles he plays. Not in the big movies like *Red River* or *All the King's Men,* where Ireland was as good an actor as anyone who ever stood in front of a camera, but the smaller ones. The movies where Ireland is the ex-Air Force officer who joins a gang of bank robbers to get money for *her;* the hitchhiker *she* picks up and seduces into murdering her husband; the ex-con going straight who is dragged back into crime so *she* can have what she wants; the gas station attendant *she* needs to drive the getaway car.

"Who," I said, "is Pauli?"

"You know," she pouted. "Paul Bambara. The manager down at the Discount Bookstore on Sixth Avenue? He's a dream!"

"Tall?" I remembered. "Kind of skinny? Dark hair? Looks like he needs sleep?"

"That's him. So pale and gaunt, Danny. He suffers so much.

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We're going to run off to Mexico. Pauli's going to do what he really wants, make things with his hands. Statues and everything. He's just bursting to be free, Danny. The wife never lets Ireland be free."

The woman who ruins John Ireland, destroys him in the end, is Gloria Grahame. For Ireland to run into Grahame in a movie is to be ruined every time. She also ruins Dick Powell the honest private eye, Robert Mitchum the dedicated young doctor, and Broderick Crawford the husband desperate to hold her.

"How long has this been going on, Isabelle?"

"Almost a whole month! He's so sensitive, Danny. He's so unhappy in that store, so unhappy with his wife. I'm going to give him a whole new life!"

Because, of course, Isabelle *is* Gloria Grahame. When Grahame died tragically young some years ago, Isabelle found her best role. She looks enough like Grahame, adds the rest in as fine an acting job as the real GG ever gave. She has the wet pout, the narrow shoulders hunched as if always cold, the thin hand curved to fit the stem of a martini glass. The sleepy eyes that are naked and hooded at the same time. The limp, pipe-stem wrists and dangling cigarette. The slender body and lazy drawl that hides the tiger.

Isabelle lives the role from her clothes to her manner and her men, hanging around with half the gamblers, drug dealers and con men in Little Italy and the Village. Only they're not important to her. They can't be John Irelands.

"I know it's the real thing this time!" Isabelle said, glowing. "Especially now."

A headache was beginning at the back of my eyes. Isabelle's fantasies have a way of causing headaches.

"Did you happen to see who shot at you, Isabelle?"

"Well, I'm not sure, but there was this big guy in a raincoat and hat and with a kind of limp, just like Robert Ryan."

I felt as if my brain were floating in some late-late show haze. With Isabelle, your reality can begin to blur.

"Grace Kelly got to have hired Ryan, Danny," Isabelle said.

"You mean Paul Bambara's wife, Isabelle?" I had a strong urge to toss a silver dollar in my hand where I sat behind my desk, just like George Raft.

"Of course, silly," Isabelle beamed, and then frowned. "Unless maybe it was Eddie. You know, jealous and drinking because I jilted him. Out to get me."

Eddie Bauer had been last year's John Ireland. A taxi driver whose wife had thrown him out after he got mixed up with Isabelle

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and lost his job. Isabelle had ditched him for a short fling with a muscular type with dazzling teeth—Burt Lancaster.

"You sure any of this really happened, Isabelle?"

For a moment I felt like Jack Nicholson, feet on my desk, hat tilted down over my eyes. Except that I wasn't wearing a hat. Isabelle will do that to you.

"Dan Fortune! You know I never lie! Does this look like I made it up?"

She held out a handbag about the size of a feedbag for a Clydesdale. There was a neat hole through both sides of the bag. Big holes, about .357 Magnum. Real holes.

"Okay, Isabelle, I'll look around. In the meantime, be careful, and maybe stay away from this Paul Bambara."

She was on her feet, the indignant Gloria Grahame. "Pauli needs me! We're going to go places, do things, be someone! We have to make plans. We're going to *do* something, Danny!"

I sighed. "Okay, pay me some cash before you go."

"Well," she rummaged in that expensive feed bag, came out with a crumpled twenty. "I'm a little short this week, but I'll pay your regular price. Me and Pauli are going to get rich."

"Swell," I said, and resisted a nasty Robert Montgomery laugh.

2

Opening credits voiceover: Who would want to shoot Isabelle? Why? A romantic and an innocent. A dreamer who only wanted to find her John Ireland and ruin him. Ruin him in the eyes of his normal world, that is, the dull everyday world he really hated. Ruined and free to run away to a better life. The better life of doing what he really wanted to do, being what he really wanted to be, even if he fell on his face and ended up drinking alone in some forgotten Mexican village.

For Isabelle, the losers are the winners. She's seen all the movies about all the losers and there's so much life in their misery that compared to our dull lives their suffering becomes happiness. A romantic fantasy, but where was a motive for murder?

I got my beret and duffel coat and went out. In the thin November rain I walked down to the Discount Bookstore on Sixth Avenue. Paul Bambara was out at some warehouse, they didn't know when he'd be back. I got his home address.

It turned out to be a good brownstone on 9th Street near Fifth. An expensive address and he had the expensive apartment: second

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floor front, the parlor floor. It wasn't what I would have expected for the manager of a Sixth Avenue bookstore. I rang the mailbox bell and got buzzed in. A woman waited for me in the open doorway of the second floor front.

"What can I do for you?"

"Mrs. Paul Bambara?"

She eyed me coldly. A short, stocky woman with jet black hair and shadowed Mediterranean eyes.

"If you want Paul, he ain't home."

"Can I talk to you?"

"Me?" Suspicion was sharp in her voice. She didn't invite me in. Maybe that was just her natural brand of hospitality.

"Do you know an Isabelle Kucera, Mrs. Bambara?"

Her manner changed abruptly. The cool eyes stared hard at me, but there was a shakiness in her voice. "What about her?"

"Someone tried to shoot her."

"Shoot? You a cop?"

"Private," I said. "Working for Miss Kucera. Can I ask where you were this morning?"

"Right here. I got three witnesses. You want me to get them?"

"Maybe later." She would have the witnesses, real or faked. "Can you think of anyone who would want Miss Kucera dead?"

"A woman like that? Listen, Mr.—?"

"Fortune. Dan Fortune."

"Listen, Mr. Fortune, I know all about that woman and her men. All the other women's husbands." She was hugging her breasts now, looking me straight in the eye. Her full lips were sad, even trembling, and her voice had a dark throb. Not Grace Kelly, no. Ingrid Bergman. Isabelle's fantasies are insidious. "I know her, but I won't fight her. Not that way. Paul is a good man, a good husband. This is his home. He'll come back to me, Mr. Fortune. He'll find he belongs here."

"I hope he does, Mrs. Bambara," I said, which was partly true; Isabelle deserved better. "You're sure you can't think of anyone who would shoot at her?"

"No, and I'd say look into her past, Mr. Fortune."

It seemed like good advice, so I went back to my office and put out some feelers on Eddie Bauer. It was late afternoon before I located him in a flea-trap on the West Side. He was at home with a bottle for company. A long, lean type with two days' growth of beard and a haunted expression. He sneered at me.

"I don't know you, chum."

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Dan Duryea down on his luck, or maybe it was my imagination. Maybe just a long day with Isabelle's shadow script, my brain going soft. My own voice lisping an answer.

"I know you, friend. I'm coming in."

Humphrey Bogart. He backed off warily, his hands dangling. I hung a cigarette from my lip, snapped a match on my thumbnail.

"All right, Lou . . . Bauer," I said, "read me the song and dance of where you were this morning, and make it good."

"What's it to you, chum?" Bauer/Duryea sneered.

I told him about Isabelle and the shooting.

"Dead?" he grinned.

"You'd like that, would you?"

"I wouldn't cry too hard, chummy, only you can't hang this one on me. I was here all morning, and I can prove it."

This time I made him prove it. He did. With five poker players from the building, one an off-duty cop. By then it was way past time for a beer and even some dinner so I knocked off.

I wasn't sure I was even hearing what people were really saying by then. Maybe I was just imagining the dialogue according to Isabelle's shooting script. Maybe the holes in her handbag weren't bullet holes. Maybe if I forgot about it, it would all do a quick dissolve.

3

Jump cut: To Isabelle's apartment down on Spring Street. Monday evening. The apartment is early Warner Brothers Greenwich Village just like in *Reds*—orange crates, a covered bathtub for a table, brick and board bookcases. Except for all the photos on the walls. You could have cast a hundred Hollywood epics with the actors and actresses on Isabelle's walls.

In the apartment, just home from work, Isabelle's eyes are shining like Judy Garland seeing Oz for the first time.

"They searched the apartment while I was at work!"

The place is a mess, right enough.

"What's missing?"

"I don't know. I don't keep any money around." Then she almost squealed. "Maybe my diary! That man with the limp is a private eye just like you. Grace Kelly hired him to steal my diary so she could confront John Ireland!"

"Let's take a look." I was trying hard to keep what grip I had on reality. With Isabelle, it has a way of sliding away.

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The diary was where she had left it, all its pages intact. I went over the small apartment inch by inch with her, and she found nothing missing for a long time. Then she gave a cry.

"My new makeup case!"

"What makeup case?"

"It's like a little suitcase, you know? It's leather, and it's got all these plastic bottles and jars inside. Pauli only gave it to me a couple of days ago for my acting classes."

"Bambara gave it to you?"

"I said so, didn't I?"

"Let's go find him," I said.

We took a cab to the Discount Bookstore on Sixth, and Isabelle got Paul Bambara to take a coffee break and meet us in the Vesuvius Coffee Shop on Waverly. A pale, scrawny man in his thirties, he was wearing Levi cords, a rugby shirt, and a tweed jacket with fake leather elbow patches from some cutrate men's store up on 14th Street. Isabelle introduced us. He gave me a hard grip and tried to look tough and restless as John Ireland should.

Isabelle told him about the search and the makeup case.

"The case I gave you? Why would anyone want that?"

"Maybe," Isabelle said eagerly, "your wife wants my fingerprints! I remember one time when Ireland's wife got Gloria Grahame's fingerprints so she could check her criminal past."

I said, "Leather doesn't take prints, neither does plastic."

"And you don't have a record," Bambara said. I didn't think he would last. Realism wasn't Isabelle's forte.

"Maybe," Isabelle chewed a fingernail, "she wanted something I'd *touched,* something from my body! Some hair, maybe. Like in that voodoo movie where Agnes Moorehead makes a doll of Gloria Grahame and sticks pins in it to make her die."

"You feel sick?" I asked.

"Not yet, silly. She's only had it half a day."

"Isabelle," I kept a tight grip on my psyche, "this is New York, not Haiti. That stuff only works if you believe it."

"Well," she pouted heavily, almost Shirley Temple, "maybe she just wants evidence for a divorce. I mean, it was a present from Pauli."

"Angela don't believe in divorce," Bambara said, gloomy.

I said, "Where'd you buy the case, Bambara?"

"I didn't, I got it from Angela," Bambara said. "She sells them, you know? She and her brother got a cosmetic and makeup business. Door-to-door like the Avon lady. They make a bundle."

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"That's how you can afford that apartment? Her money?"

"We sure couldn't afford it on mine."

"You bought the makeup case from her?"

"Hell no! I mean, she'd want to know why I needed a woman's makeup case, right? I swiped it when she was out. She's got so many, she never even missed it."

There was something in that. Why would Angela Bambara want her own makeup case back? One of perhaps hundreds she had for sale? If she had wanted it back. If someone else hadn't taken it from the apartment.

"Is there anyone who could be after you, Bambara?" I asked. "Someone from your past?"

"I don't have a past," Bambara said. John Ireland all the way. "A lot of crummy jobs like the one I got. Never been out of New York. Never done anything."

"You will," Isabelle said fervently. "There's got to be some kick to life, Pauli. We're going after it even if we can't hold it. Maybe we'll fall on our faces, rot in Mexico, end up hating each other, but we'll have grabbed for the big ring!"

"She's right, ain't she, Fortune?" He gripped my arm like a vulture clawing a tree branch. "Mexico, work with my hands, live if it kills us in the end!"

He had that feverish pipedream in his voice John Ireland always got around Gloria Grahame. Maybe he would last.

"You're sure you don't know why someone would steal that case, Bambara?" I said.

"Not a clue, Fortune."

I left them cooing at each other over their beers, seeing Mexican sunsets in the suds. I walked up Sixth Avenue and across to Eighth and my office. Why steal a simple makeup case? Or take a shot at an innocent like Isabelle? An internal Humphrey Bogart lisped in my ear, "Something funny going on for sure, pal," and I decided to do a stakeout—on Isabelle.

Stock shots: A one-armed man shivering in the November shadows as he watches a bright young couple have a wonderful time. The one-armed man is not having a wonderful time. The one-armed man follows the young couple. The one-armed man is cold. It becomes dark, and the one-armed man becomes aware of a short, stocky man in a black raincoat. Camera angle over the one-armed man's shoulder. The short man is also watching the young couple. Jackpot!

There is a procession. John Ireland and Gloria Grahame hand

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in hand. The small man, Peter Lorre, casually behind them. The one-armed man, me, behind Peter Lorre. Until Isabelle and Paul Bambara finally reach Isabelle's apartment and go up. Peter Lorre looks up until the light goes on in Isabelle's apartment, then turns away. Fortune/Bogart lisps mentally, "Stick to this character, pal, he'll lead you to the big boy."

Six blocks later I lost him. Quick into an alley, out the other end, and gone. I didn't need a director to tell me I'd been spotted. It looked like Isabelle and Bambara were in for the night. I had nothing to do but go home. I went home.

Did you ever feel that you were sinking into quicksand? Floating away on some swirling cloud of thick fog? The quicksand of Isabelle's imagination. The fog of her fantasies.

My one room office/apartment had been torn apart.

It took me an hour to find out that nothing was missing. But my files had been rifled, the flour poured into the sink, my toothpaste tube cut open, the sugar dumped, all my chairs upended. I felt as if I were on a rollercoaster and all I could do was ride it out. What had Isabelle's make-believe gotten her into? Gotten me into?

My telephone rang.

"Danny!" Isabelle's voice cried. "Pauli's killed someone!"

4

Montage sequence: A one-armed detective running through dark city streets. A thin-faced blonde with a strand of perfectly arranged hair hanging over one eye, a cigarette dangling, and alarm registered on the thin, drooping mouth as if painted. A man in his thirties wearing a cheap tweed jacket and a shocked expression, and holding a smoking Luger.

"Who the hell is he?" I said.

The body lay on the floor of Isabelle's apartment. The short, stocky Peter Lorre who'd been following them. Paul Bambara still held the Luger, sat on the couch staring at the body.

"Joe Ciaccio," Bambara said. "My brother-in-law. He . . . he tried to kill me!"

Bambara told the whole story. He had been alone in the apartment waiting for Isabelle to return with their pizza for dinner—mushrooms, anchovies, pepperoni, the works. When he heard a knock on the door he thought Isabelle had forgotten her keys again. He opened the door. His wife's brother, Joe Ciaccio, pushed him back into the room and started to shout violently.

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"Shouting what?" I said.

"It didn't make any sense, you know? All about how I was a dead man! How dumb did we think he and Angela were? A big romance, and she was just a clerk in a crummy office, sure! Mexico! John Ireland! Gloria Grahame! Did I think they were stupid? A hot young kid and a middle-aged bum like me? Then Fortune nosing all around! Just a small-time private eye. Sure he was!"

Bambara stared up at us. "Then . . . then he pulled out this gun. He came up close, yelled right in my face. I was scared. I mean, he was crazy, he was going to shoot me! So I jumped on him. The gun got knocked to the floor. We both grabbed for it, and I knocked him down. I got the gun, he grabbed a brass lamp. He came at me again, still yelling and cursing. I . . . I shot. I had to. He was going to kill me!"

In the silence of the apartment we all looked down at the dead man.

"But," Isabelle said at last, "if he didn't think me and Pauli was in love, what did he think?"

It was the same question I was asking myself. And heard a faint answer somewhere in the back of my mind.

"Isabelle, how are you going to get to Mexico? What are you going to live on while Bambara finds himself?"

"Well, we're going to sell everything we can, and Pauli's going to sort of 'borrow' some of the money his wife makes on her business." Her eyes gleamed with cleverness. "When we get to Mexico, we'll buy a lot of pot and cocaine and sell it up here for a big profit! I know all kinds of guys will buy it."

"Guys?" I said.

"You know, silly. Gangsters and drug dealers. I know lots of them. I gave Pauli a list and he was going to talk to them, but after I got shot at we decided to wait."

"A list?" I said. "Of narcotics pushers? Where is it now?"

"I've got it," Bambara said. He produced a dog-eared sheet of typewriter paper. "We never did use it."

"You never contacted any drug dealers?"

"No," Bambara said. Isabelle shook her head.

"But you carried it around? Took it home? Maybe left it out on your bureau when you went to bed, or left it in your jacket pocket?"

"I guess so, yeh."

"And you were going to 'borrow' some of your wife's money?" I said. "Did you check out her account? Find out how much she had in it? Take a look at her records?"

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"Sure did," Bambara said. "Even checked with her bank."

I suppose I must have looked like Paul Newman who has just figured out how it all went wrong for him and Sundance.

"Dan?" Isabelle said. "You know what's going on?"

"Maybe," I said. "I think so."

I called Lieutenant Marx then, reported the shooting. Marx is head of the local precinct detective squad. He arrived with his team in under ten minutes. His men went to work on the body and the apartment while Marx listened to me. His eyes glazed as I told him Isabelle and Bambara's story and my glimmer of an answer.

"Can you prove any of that, Fortune?" Marx said, his voice a little stunned.

"Piece of cake, sweetheart," I lisped.

Marx waited until the M.E. had taken the body, told his men to take Bambara and the gun to the station house, warned Isabelle to stay in town, and nodded to me.

"Okay, Fortune, show me."

As we left, Isabelle sat staring at her wall with a faraway look in her eyes. It made me nervous.

5

At the second floor front of the good brownstone on 9th Street near Fifth, Angela Bambara herself opened the door. She stared at me, and then at Lieutenant Marx. She knew Marx, covered her mouth with her hand.

"Mr. Fortune, lieutenant! Something's happened to Paul!"

Maybe just knowing Isabelle does it. She was Ingrid Bergman even to the head twitching slightly sideways, the big eyes not quite looking at you.

"Mrs. Bambara," Marx took charge, "can you tell us where your brother is?"

"My . . . my brother?"

Marx looked at his notebook as if everything was down in damning black and white. We all play games. "Joseph Ciaccio?"

"I . . . I don't know, lieutenant. I mean, I haven't seen Joe for weeks. I mean . . . why are the police interested in Joe?"

"Because he's dead," Marx said. "Shot to death an hour ago by your husband."

"Because he tried to shoot your Paul," I said. "Now why do you suppose he wanted to do that, Mrs. Bambara?"

"Dead?" She blinked at Marx, at me. "Tried to kill Paul? No! I

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don't believe you! Either of you! I don't believe a word of it. No!"

Bergman down to the fine quiver of the lower lip, the eyes that looked everywhere like trapped birds in a small room. Isabelle was an infection. Play it again, Ingrid. There was no way I could resist.

"You're good," I said, "you're awful good. Only it won't play, not any more. You sent brother Joe to kill your husband. You and Joe were in the whole deal together. That's where all the money comes from for this apartment. You sell all right, only it's not cosmetics or makeup kits. It's the happy stuff, the trips to shiny places. You sell drugs, sweetheart, you and poor Joe. You sell it in those makeup kits, that's why you had to get that one back from Isabelle. It was loaded with H or C or whatever you're pushing.

"You found out Paul was checking your bank accounts. You spotted that list of dope dealers, and Isabelle talked about Mexico, and you got scared. You tried to shoot Isabelle, had your brother tail her, searched my place after I appeared, and tonight you sent Joe to kill Isabelle and Paul. Only Isabelle was out, Paul got the gun away from Joe, Joe's dead, and you're cooked!"

That was when Robert Ryan came out of the bedroom. A tall man in a raincoat, with a limp and a .357 Magnum. Angela Bambara had a 9-mm Luger in both hands, pointed straight at us.

"I told you, Mario!" Angela snarled. "Narcotics agents! That damned blonde and the peeper. Cosying up to Paul, getting the makeup case, checking my bank accounts, giving Paul that list of pushers. I told you the whole crazy run-off-to-Mexico-for-love stuff was a big act!"

"Narks," Ryan/Mario agreed, "both of them. Now we got the cop, too. All three got to be blown away."

Marx said, "Freelancing, De Stefano? The Don doesn't like freelancing."

"The Don ain't gonna know about it."

I knew the name. Mario De Stefano, a Mafia *cappo*.

"The girl, too," Angela Bambara said. "And Paul."

She was a beaut. Faye Dunaway ready to blast. I tried to smile, Burt Lancaster doing a death scene. It didn't work. I was going over like a two-bit extra.

But I'd reckoned without Gloria Grahame.

She came in through the outside door we'd left ajar. In a battered old trenchcoat fitted to her slim figure like skin. Hands in the pockets, hatless, her blonde hair loose, the wet pout on her lips, the cigarette dangling.

"I just had to talk to you, make you understand. Pauli needs me.

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Pauli has to be free. I know I'm no good, but—"

Angela Bambara whirled, stumbled into an armchair, shot wildly into the ceiling. Mario De Stefano jumped, tripped over a low hassock, shot hell out of a lamp and a mirror. I fell on Angela Bambara. Marx clobbered De Stefano. His men, staked outside, pounded up the stairs and finished them off.

Isabelle pouted. We had ruined her big confrontation scene. Angela Bambara glared at her before Marx's people hauled her and De Stefano off.

"She didn't fool me! Running off to Mexico with a wimp like Paul? A new life? Who did she think she was fooling? I knew she was a narcotics agent right from the start!"

Isabelle raised her thin nose defiantly, let the cigarette smoke close her left eye, curled her wet GG lip at Angela Bambara. I didn't have the heart to tell Angela or De Stefano the real truth.

At the precinct we gave our statements. The powder in the makeup case turned out to be PCP—angel dust. The late Joe Ciaccio, Angela Bambara, and De Stefano had been making it in a back room of the elegant apartment, selling it under the cover of Angela Bambara's cosmetic business.

Later, I sat with Isabelle in O. Henry's.

"A real *mafioso,* Danny! Just like Marlon Brando!"

I sighed.

"They really thought I was a narcotics agent!" Her eyes glowed in ecstasy. "Just like—"

I'd had enough. Her fantasies had killed one man, and next time they could kill her. Or me.

"Stop it!" I said. "You're not Gloria Grahame. Bambara's not John Ireland. De Stefano's a two-bit punk, not Marlon Brando!"

She didn't even hear me. "Pauli's going back to Angela. In the end, when Gloria Grahame leaves him, John Ireland always goes back to his wife."

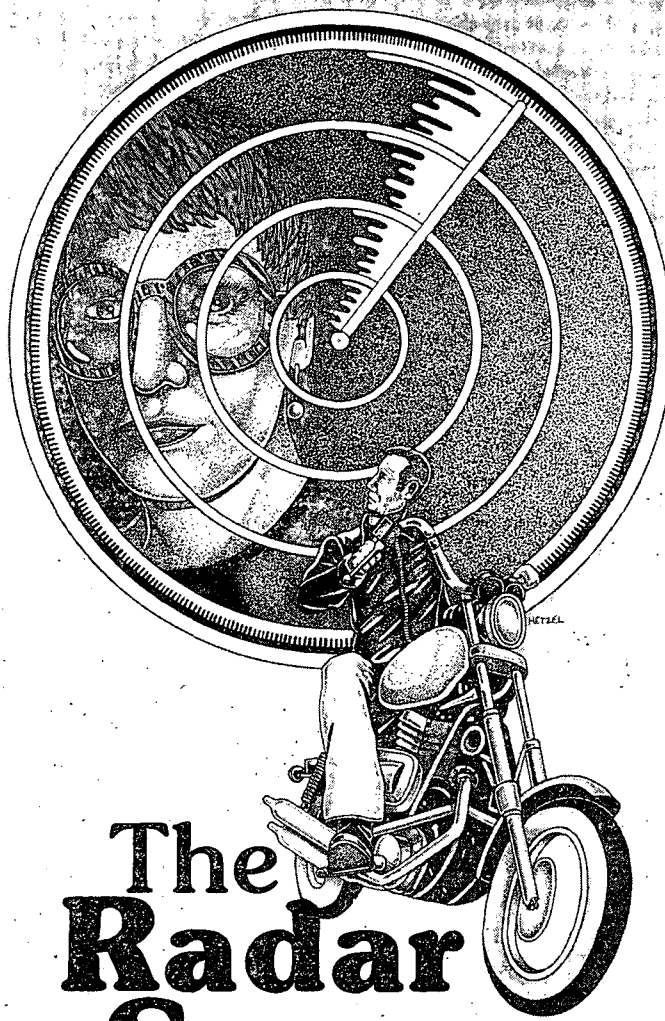
I gave up. Isabelle would always be Isabelle.

"Will she go to prison for long, Danny?" she said. "Angela, I mean?"

"A long time, sweetheart," I said. "When she comes out, Pauli'll be waiting for her, just like Steve McQueen."

Isabelle smiled, her bright eyes seeing all the way to Hollywood.

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The Radar Screen

by T. Robin Kantner

Illustration by Steve Hetzel

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Rick normally shunned expressways. Call him old-fashioned, a man who resisted change. Expressways were bland and polished and looked the same wherever you were in the country. They were crowded with goofs and geeks and cops glued to radar screens. The fact that they were fast didn't matter to Rick; he usually wasn't in a hurry to get anywhere.

Nevertheless, Rick was using the Pennsylvania Turnpike. He wasn't heartbroken about it. The Pennsylvania Turnpike has some semblance of character, carved as it is among the worn, rugged old Appalachians, featuring spectacular views of misty, forested valleys and jagged, rocky cliffs. Besides, Ruth lived very near it—practically next to it—and Rick had to be there before nightfall. Even using expressways, it had taken him better than ten hours of hard riding from northeast Indiana.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike is unique in its countless paved aprons, some of which extend quite far back from the roadway. Truckers and others use them for rest stops. Rick knew exactly the one he wanted. It was some distance past Exit 2 on the eastbound side, in Butler County northeast of Pittsburgh. From the setting autumn sun, Rick judged that he'd arrived around six o'clock.

The apron was deserted. The big Harley-Davidson 74 motor rumbled as Rick rolled in, dropped his big heavily booted feet, and coasted to a stop at the very edge of the apron by a trash barrel. He reached down stiffly and shut off the ignition. The engine growled and sputtered and died, and Rick made a note to himself to check the timing one day soon.

He dismounted, stretched his aching legs, and began removing the snap-straps that held his worn green duffel bag to the chrome sissy bar. Behind him the expressway whispered with the occasional car and roared with the occasional truck. There was a chill in the air. Too far north, Rick thought. What a fool. But this was where Ruth was. He wasn't ready to articulate it to himself just yet, but in his mind he thought about heading for the warm weather in the morning. And not alone this time.

He hoisted the duffel bag, drew it clumsily over his back, and hoofed heavily toward the edge of the apron where the trees began. He passed an emergency telephone mounted on a blue steel pole, which, if Rick had had any use for such things, he'd have recalled wasn't there the last time he came through. He reached the woods and started down the steep bluff.

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The forest folded around him. Rick's legs, badly healed from a long-ago war injury and several errors in driving judgment since, protested as he half-skidded down the grade, the heavy duffel pressing him forward. The slope leveled on a small, half-open grassy bluff, the pines and maples reaching up all around him. He gratefully dropped the bag and listened. Not a sound except for the forest; even the highway noises were gone.

He ambled to the edge of the bluff and looked down. The forest continued, dense and green, for a quarter of a mile, and then ended at the edge of a subdivision. The first house, a tall white colonial, was clearly visible and apparently deserted. Rick knew better. Ruth was there and watching for his signal.

Turning to his duffel, he unclipped it and drew out a bright yellow windbreaker. He wandered under the trees, looking up, and then tossed it onto the lower limbs of an old maple. It flapped slowly in the breeze, gradually unfolded itself, and settled down.

Half an hour later, Rick had his old, heavy green tarp roped up into a lean-to between a couple of the trees. His two army-issue sleeping bags were spread out on the ground beneath it, very neatly because Ruth was a meticulously neat person. He sat on the ground, leaning against a tree, rolling a cigarette from a cloth bag of Bull Durham tobacco. When it was ready, he lighted it with a match from a bent cardboard packet that advertised some truck stop near Oklahoma City. After a couple of long, exhilarating drags, he cupped the cigarette between his thumb and first finger and exercised one of his best-developed talents: waiting.

Rick was medium-sized and lean, a tough, compact man of slow and definite movements. Men generally thought he was big; women generally thought he was handsome. He was neither. He barely topped five nine even in his heavy leather boots, and he was medium-boned and spare; he had a coarse, hard face, with more nose and chin than he needed, shaggy black hair, and an expression that was usually vacant and dull, a result of years of enduring the monotonous roar of highway engines. But Rick carried himself with directness and authority—no tentativeness at all—and the average man mistook this for physical size. And Rick was a highwayman, a free rider, with nowhere to be, nothing to prove, and no one to impress. That invariably impres-

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sed women and made them take him for handsome. And, more frequently than not, take him.

But in all the miles and all the years he'd never stopped more than once for anyone but Ruth. He heard her now. Footsteps among the trees. He drew on his cigarette and exhaled as she emerged, head first, up the rise. She wore denim pants, a blue chambray shirt, hiking boots, and glasses. Rick felt his face make a smile, but an alarm bell went off in his mind, and he wondered, thinking back on the other times.

It had started three or four years back, who could tell? Rick was in a position he detested: traveling with a destination, and late besides. So he took the turnpike and pushed the Harley too hard and blew the valve cover gasket. He pulled into an apron (which became *the* apron) to make repairs. Nearly done, weary, oil-stained, and hungry, he encountered Ruth, who was walking aimlessly in the woods above her house, impeccably dressed in designer jeans, a see-through blouse, and earth shoes. They had struck up a conversation, then friendly sparks, then spent hours together, late into the night, at his campsite in the woods.

She approached him now, smiling, as he rose stiffly to his feet. His face retained the same flat, distant, involuntary smile, but he watched her keenly. The clothes and the glasses were all wrong.

She said, her voice a low chuckle, "You made it."

He grinned. It was their traditional opening banter. "Not yet."

She laughed and came into his arms. They hugged for a long moment, Rick's grip iron tight; then she broke and stood back. Ruth was a well-rounded woman in her middle forties, with short-cropped light brown hair, deep blue eyes, good teeth, and smooth, creamy skin. She carried herself with the sprightliness of a girl and had the same demeanor, but Rick knew that there was a counterpoint of intensity in her. Burning intensity, physical and emotional. She looked up at him and laughed again and asked, "Any problems out there?"

"Nah." He nodded toward the bluff and the tall white colonial barely visible through the trees. "Got yourself covered?"

"Of course," she said innocently, moving toward the edge of the clearing. She pushed aside some tall grass and pulled out a red and white Coleman ice chest. "I'm covered for the night." She winked. "All night, Rick."

He eyed her speculatively. Nice work, he thought. Don't even have to sneak back to your

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husband's bed in the middle of the night, huh, suburban lady? Maybe you won't have to go back at all, ever. He took a last hot toke on his cigarette, dropped it on the ground, crushed the butt with his foot, then carefully picked up the scrap of paper while Ruth dragged her ice chest clumsily over the ground to the lean-to.

When she opened the lid, Rick saw a tightly wrapped bag of ice, two bottles of Beaujolais, and a couple of dishes that undoubtedly contained salad, bread, and one of her cold shrimp specialties. Sure beats the usual warmed-over campsite slop, Rick thought. She handed one of the wine bottles to him, along with a corkscrew, and said brightly, "When you've got that breathing, why don't you rustle up some firewood?" She laughed again, oddly.

"What for?"

"For a *fire,* Rick. Honestly," she said with amused exasperation, turning back to her work.

The bottle was ice cold in Rick's calloused hands; the corkscrew gleamed like a medieval weapon in the quickly setting sun. Ruth was busy spreading the dishes, plates, glasses, and utensils out on the sleeping bags, and did not look at him, but hummed nervously. Rick watched her good, ringless hands as they quickly and efficiently made the arrangements. "Maybe I missed something," he said tentatively. "Won't your family see the campfire from down there? It'd be like taking out an ad."

She looked up at him with an expression of total innocence, total casualness. "They're away for the night." She smiled. "I *really* fixed things this time, Rick."

He fashioned a dumb grin and nod, squatted on the ground with his back to her, fixed the corkscrew at the top of the bottle, and began twisting. His eyes found the tall white colonial and he stopped twisting for a moment, staring at it. He almost asked her then, but couldn't bring himself to do it.

Dishes cleared, sun gone, fire roaring. Rick lay back on the sleeping bags beneath the lean-to, head propped on his duffel bag and his battered legs drawn up. He'd stripped the heavy black boots off his feet. Ruth sat next to him, her thigh touching his, cross-legged. They each held half-full wine glasses. The fire blazed yellow off her face, making her look younger and more attractive. Rembrandt lighting, Rick thought, unable to recall where he'd heard the expression. He found it hard to keep his eyes off her.

Gorged on food and wine, they had been silent for many

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minutes. Rick set his wine glass aside, got a paper and his bag of Bull Durham out of his shirt pocket, and began rolling a cigarette. Ruth reached a long hand out and gave his leg a proprietary squeeze and caress. "How're the wheels holding up?" she asked.

Rick licked the paper, twisted the cigarette together, flashed a match, and puffed deeply. "Not too bad. No worse'n usual."

"One of our gallant war heroes," she mused.

"Wrong all three ways." He knew she wanted to hear the story again, but he'd told her before and he was not in the mood to relive an event so many miles in the past. Even so, the memories played in his mind as if it had happened yesterday instead of—translating it to unaccustomed terms—twenty years before.

He saw himself, a callow young navy airman apprentice, hardly recognizable as the rough rider sprawled before tonight's campfire. He saw the ten other crewmen crammed in a P-2 anti-submarine warfare plane. He felt the heavy headphones of the SWX scanner resting on his head, the aching green of the radar screen before him. He saw the velvety blue Caribbean below, the pale green and rich brown of Cuba looming in the distance.

And then the completely unexpected .50 caliber machine gun bullets stitching the aircraft from wings to tail. The screams. The heavy, lumbering dive as the aircraft plunged toward the Bay of Pigs.

Blackout, and then the smell of seawater as Rick, bloodsoaked, crawled over dead bodies, dragging his useless legs, toward the shattered Perspex windscreen while the plane bucked in the waves. . . .

Officially, of course, the United States was not involved in the invasion attempt. The loss of the P-2 was billed as a tragic training accident. Rick spent nearly a year in the naval hospital in Miami, recovering the use of his mangled legs. His survival was a potential embarrassment to the navy, so they gave him an eighty percent disability pension and an honorable discharge and washed their hands of him.

No one had wanted him since. No one except the bike and the highway and Ruth.

She broke the silence. "Spend any time at the farm this summer?"

"Couple days." The farm, really a commune of outcasts in Oregon, was the closest thing to a home that Rick had—he received his disability checks there. "Got fidgety. Got to do a certain number of miles a day or I don't feel right. And winter's coming; got to make the

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move south pretty soon." Old, well-used words.

She slid closer to him, cradling his leg in her arm, and sipped some wine. For an instant he forgot his own thoughts and reflected on her appearance again. Suburban lady, what's your game? he asked silently. But his face betrayed nothing. She said, "It must be wonderful. No ties. Total freedom."

He stared straight ahead and drew on his cigarette. "You know," he said clumsily, "it's got its good parts and all, but you know what? Every kind of life has its good parts and bad parts. You just do what you got to do, and you gotta know when it's time to move on. I mean, I keep moving and that's all right. I'm not on anybody's radar screen and that's suited me just fine for . . . for a long time. But sleeping in the rain's no fun. Being run off the road's no kick. Doing pickup and carry work is just plain bad. And getting mashed up in wrecks is the worst, and the older I get the longer it takes to heal up and get back in the saddle."

She made her odd laugh, but her face had closed up cold. "You want to talk lousy living," she said in a low voice, "we could talk about a certain thickheaded, cheapskate, boozing husband. And a whining, freeloading mother-in-law. And a foulmouthed, snotty teenage brat who's not even my blood." Mouth pursed, she stared pensively at the fire. "Like you say, Rick, you've got to know when it's time to move on."

She bent forward and they kissed, inexpertly because of her glasses. She pulled back, took them off, and they kissed again, wrapping themselves together. Her last words replayed in Rick's mind and he felt a lightening of spirit in himself. Maybe, just maybe. As they rolled back on the sleeping bags, his eyes went to the heavy tortoise-framed glasses on the ground beyond her and one part of him muttered a low warning. But only one part of him.

He woke alone. The fire had consumed itself down to low red embers, popping softly; the moon flew high above the forest in a cloudless sky. Turning over into a sitting position, Rick listened intently for the road and heard nothing. He pulled on his heavy pants and slipped his feet into his boots. The woman could wait; first he had to check the bike.

He climbed up the path and emerged onto the apron. An occasional car or truck roared by on the road, broadcasting beams of light, but otherwise the cool midnight silence was complete. The Harley stood where he'd

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left it, half-lighted by the moon. Ruth was there, her back to him, her hand on the throttle grip. She turned abruptly as he appeared and made a relieved sound. "My God, you frightened me."

He walked toward her slowly. Her face was hidden by the darkness, the moonlight playing brightly with her hair. He asked casually, "What gives?"

"Just looking." Her eyes ran over the machine. "What a beautiful, ugly old hunk of iron."

He smiled. "You ever ride, Ruth?"

"Oh, a little," she said. "But smaller ones. How do you start this, anyway? The ones I've ridden, there's a little button—"

Yeah, Rick, the purist, thought. Electric ignition. And big old fairings to keep the nasty wind off your face. And cute leather saddlebags, and shiny chrome. "Kick start. You turn on the ignition, then pop that pedal down."

"Oh." Her eyes never left the bike. "Is it easy?"

Rick was not a liar, and he never knew what made him say the glib, casual lie now. "Sure. You just get up as high as you can on the pedal, bring all your weight down, smooth as silk, and she's running."

She laughed oddly and left the bike, walking toward him. "It looks like a lot of fun." She put her arm around him and they headed down the bluff again. "I think there's some wine left."

"Good," he said absently, thinking about lies. They reached the campsite and Rick poked the coals until a halfway respectable blaze was going again. As Ruth poured them some wine, Rick sat down on the rumpled sleeping bags and began making a cigarette. "So what's been happening the past year?"

She'd put her glasses back on. Her jeans and shirt were smooth and perfect. That's Ruth, he thought; pristine even in ditch-digger clothes, even after rolling around in them in the woods. She answered, that closed, cold expression coming over her again, "The same, Rick. Nothing ever changes."

"Yeah?" He searched his memory. "What about your sister?"

"My sister?" she asked sharply.

He kept it light but watched her intently. "You ever find her?"

"Oh, that." She drank some wine with unaccustomed sloppiness, wiped her mouth, and said, "No luck there. I've about given up. I got tired of paying detectives and lawyers and coming up with nothing. I even ran ads in the paper up there, and got nowhere. She was adopted before me. The agency

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that arranged it is out of business, the court records are buried deep and locked tight, the people involved are dead or have disappeared, and she's just plain gone. I just . . . couldn't beat my head against the wall anymore."

When she was done finally, Rick put the cigarette between his lips and lighted it. "Too bad," he said, and meant it.

She said shyly, "Tell me a road story. As a birthday present."

He stared at his glowing cigarette and the weariness that had been chasing him like a ghost for the past few months suddenly poured over him. God in heaven, who the hell cares? But she did, and he would not disappoint her. Should I tell her about the tank of bad gas that stranded me in the desert on Route 60 in New Mexico? How about the two-hundred car chain collision in East St. Louis? Or maybe the angelic looking jailbait hitchhiker who tried to blackmail me in Maine? He finally told her about the gypsy long-haul trucker he'd done loading work for in North Carolina, who was busted for smuggling cigarettes and nearly got Rick landed in jail along with him.

The fire was dying for the last time as he finished the story. As it faded, the air around them grew cooler. Ruth's face was glowing from the evening, the wine, the storytelling. She crawled over to him and nestled herself comfortably in his arms. "It all sounds wonderful," she breathed.

He straightened with a jerk, disengaging her. "Well, it's not," he said harshly.

She gasped as her wine spilled on her pants. Looking hurt, she began, "Rick—"

He took a savage drag on his cigarette. "You know how long it's been? You know how many miles it's been? And it's been nothin', you read me? I got to get off it or *get it off me,* I'm not sure which." Her face was solemn, and he finally got the words out. "I want out of it and I want you with me somewhere, see?"

She didn't change expression in the long pause. Then she said casually, "Sure, of course, Rick."

He stared without meaning to. "You mean you'll bust loose of this and—"

"Yes, of course I will!" she laughed, grabbing him and hugging him.

"Well," he said huskily as they slid themselves down, "that's real good then, real good."

She nuzzled his neck, saying nonsense happy words.

He said suddenly, "Listen, what the hell. Nobody's at your house. Let's go on down there. I'd like to sleep in a real bed for a change. Start getting used to

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it, I mean."

She kept kissing him but didn't say anything for a minute. Then she raised herself up and met his eyes. "Please, no, Rick," she pleaded. "Give me one more night like this. Then we'll do whatever you want. Wherever you want."

He pulled her back down and held her tightly. The fire expired with a final pop. Rick drew one of the sleeping bags over them to keep out the autumn chill.

He suddenly came wide awake, prickling like a suspicious panther. The sun was taking over the eastern horizon and shone brightly through the trees. He got to his feet carefully, then realized his legs didn't hurt any more. In fact, he didn't hurt anywhere. First time in years. He smiled into the sunshine, then, stretching, looking around for Ruth. There was a note pinned to his duffel by the strap, in bright red handwriting:

COME ON DOWN TO THE HOUSE.
BREAKFAST IS READY.

XXX

Beautiful, he thought. A hot meal to start the day. It would be interesting, too, seeing her house; he'd never been near it. He started for the path on rejuvenated legs and thought about today's run. Maybe out to the farm in Oregon first, he thought; then we can think of someplace to land for good. Someplace warm . . .

After about a fifteen-minute downhill hike through the dark forest, Rick emerged into the sunshine onto the still dewy, lush lawn of Ruth's tall white colonial. The house looked silent, windows dark, as did the others that stretched down the cul-de-sac in the distance. He was halfway across the lawn when he nearly tripped over the shotgun.

He glanced around, then bent and picked it up. It was a Savage two-barrel, probably twenty gauge, sawn off and slick with dew. He held it in his calloused hands, frozen. A hard-edged street voice said, put the weapon down *now,* boy, and get back to the bike and get your road-happy ass out of here. But he shook off the notion. Sure, it was strange, but probably innocent.

Rick carried the shotgun in his right hand and walked to the house. A patio yawned out into the lush bluegrass, arrayed with tubular aluminum lawn furniture. Expensive stuff. A double-glass sliding door offered access to the house. It stood half open. Rick listened for an endless moment—the shotgun going slicker yet in his hand—then called: "Hey, Ruth?"

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Dead silence.

Rick called one more time, to no avail. Then he laid the shotgun on the concrete deck, pushed the sliding door the rest of the way open, and stepped in through flowing white draperies.

The unlighted family room showed uniform dark brown: walnut paneling, deep plush earth-tone carpet, brown leather sofa and loveseat, matching glass-topped end tables, massive coffee table. Expensive hardbound books filled the shelves around the fireplace; gold-framed pictures stood on the coffee table and end tables. It was a rich room, a place where Rick would have been uncomfortable even under normal circumstances. Rick swallowed hard as he detected a faint, acrid smell. He looked around slowly. He was about to call out again but didn't. Instead he walked heavily to the far corner, where an overstuffed highbacked swivel chair stood with its back to him. He turned the chair around. . . .

The woman was in her late sixties. Long, blondish-gray hair was coiled into a braid and looped around her shoulder. She wore a baby blue housecoat and slippers. One slipper, that is. She'd apparently kicked the other one off in her death struggle after the shotgun load took her full in the chest. Judging from the dry blood that covered the gaping hole and soaked the chair cushion, it was an injury she'd incurred hours, not minutes, ago. Her mouth hung open with eternal surprise, upper denture loose and dangling, eyes wide and vacant.

Rick felt himself shaking. The hairs on his arms and the nape of his neck rose fractionally. His mouth went dry. He'd seen dead people before, people killed violently, but never a murdered, executed one. He turned without thinking and walked to the hallway that led from the country kitchen to the front of the house.

The man was in the living room, sprawled in a spread-legged squat like a little boy, leaning against the wall between two book-laden mahogany shelving units. He was in his early fifties, looked as if he'd been very fit, and wore a blue business suit with his tie loosened. He'd taken it in the chest, too, but part of his head was gone also. Longer range, Rick thought numbly. Less surprise. Needed both barrels to finish him.

Rick was about to walk upstairs but saw that there was no need. A shirtless teenaged boy in running shorts and bare feet lay, limbs askew, about two-thirds of the way up. His bare back was black with dried blood. Heard the shots, Rick

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thought. Ran. But the wrong way.

After checking the rest of the ground floor, wandering around almost in a trance, he found her at the bottom of the basement stairs.

In the dim light he saw that she wore red cords, a pink sleeveless blouse, white sandals. Wedding rings, but no glasses on her face or anywhere else. At least she died looking good, Rick thought, wishing he could stop staring at the massive rents in the back of her blouse.

"Freeze."

A male voice, low, almost conversational, and quite serious. "You got it," Rick murmured.

"Take two steps back. Then turn just as slow as you can."

Rick did so. The sheriff's deputy was young, lean, blond, in a tan uniform and wearing a Smoky Bear hat. His long-barreled .38 revolver was cupped in both fists, pointed at Rick. His bland face broke into a shout. "Okay, sherf! I got him right here."

Two other deputies came in the patio door entrance, one holding the shotgun gingerly with a cloth. They stopped for a minute to stare at the dead woman in the family room, then went through the rest of the house. The front door flew open and a thick-set, heavily muscled man in uniform strode in. Out the front door Rick could see two patrol cars with big stars on the doors and bubble-lights flashing. The sheriff, a man in his early fifties with a hard, tanned face, sideburns flared out over his jowls, and reflecting aviator sunglasses covering his eyes, said, "What gives, Earl?"

"There's deads all over the place," Earl answered laconically.

The sheriff turned to Rick. In a blinding, expertly executed move, he got a massive arm through Rick's and a leg in between his and flipped him hard, face down, onto the indoor/outdoor carpeted kitchen floor. Rick gasped and panted as he felt rough, uncaring hands paw at his clothes. The search ended. "You just stay put," the sheriff said unemotionally.

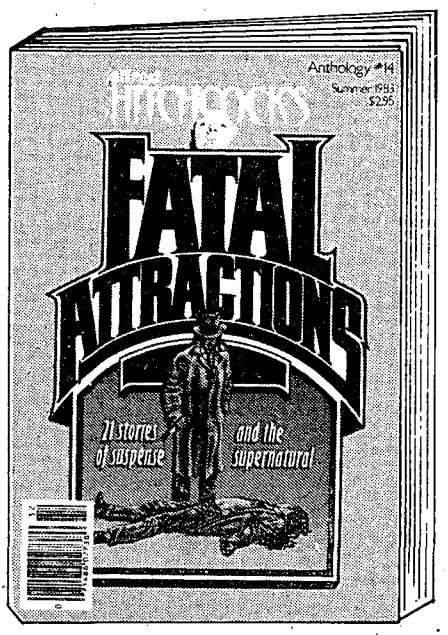
Rick heard a deputy trot down the hall to the kitchen. "Sheriff," he said in a high, tense voice, "the kid's dead on the stairs. Matthew, well, he got it in the living room. His mother's over there in the family room. Shotgun."

Earl added quietly, "We got the weapon, sherf. Found it on the patio yonder. Print boys'll have a ball with it."

"What about Ruth?" the sheriff asked.

"Haven't found her," the other deputy said. "Unless—" Appar-

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ently he turned and looked down the basement stairs; Rick couldn't tell with his face glued as it was to the carpet. "Better take a look, sheriff," the deputy said after a long silence.

Rick heard the sheriff's heavy steps as he went downstairs. After an endless interval, he came back up. A hand got Rick by the scruff of his neck and hauled him to his feet, spun him, and jammed him hard against the kitchen wall next to a cork board headed "Dumb Things I Gotta Do Today." Rick's eyes went fuzzy; he barely saw the glowering sheriff and his deputies facing him.

"What'd you have against these people?" the sheriff demanded.

"I didn't do it. I found them just like this."

"Just happened to stumble on this, huh?" the sheriff asked sarcastically.

"And that's not Ruth down there," Rick added in a dull voice.

The sheriff glanced at the deputies. "Oh, noooo. I'm sure you're right. I only been knowing Ruth Stewart since we were nine years old, you know."

"No disrespect, sir," Rick said, breathing deeply, getting his balance, "but you're wrong. Ruth and I spent the night together, back up there in the hills by the turnpike. We'd done it before. Whatever's going on, that's not her down there, I guarantee it."

The sheriff turned to Earl and said in a disgusted voice, "Frisk him and cuff him and book him and keep him the *hell* out of my sight."

Other men were coming into the house now, men in business suits, carrying medical bags, cameras, other equipment. Their voices were calm and purposeful, the carnage around them nothing more than just another day's work. Rick said urgently, "If you'd check it out, you'd find her dishes up there. Wine bottles. Other stuff. Might give you something to think about, sheriff."

The sheriff, who had started away, faced Rick, mouth hard and set. Thankfully, he was a man who could give an inch, but he would not do it charitably. "Gonna have to check it out anyway, I reckon. But you just watch your step, boy. It wouldn't break my heart to have to shoot you trying to escape. Fact is, it would neaten up this thing for us."

Rick, thinking about his legs, managed a smile. "I'll go real slow, sheriff."

The morning sun was full and hot now, but once in the woods the men felt that peculiar damp coolness that never goes away. Rick walked first, the sheriff and the deputy named Earl fanned out

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behind him. None of them spoke. When they reached the campsite, nothing had changed. But the dishes and ice chest were gone. So were the wine bottles. And the note.

Rick stood there staring as the two policemen wandered around the campsite, faces knowing and skeptical. The sheriff looked at Rick. "So where's the stuff you was talking about?"

Rick said, "She must have—"

The sheriff: "Earl, you get some boys up here and rope off this place. I'm taking Easy Rider, here, in myself."

Rick was thinking furiously. Of course. That's how she did it, it must be. A raw stab of despair cut through him: oh Ruth, damn it, why. But he thrust it away to examine in another time and place. He said, "Sheriff, I got a favor to ask."

"Forget it."

"My bike. Let me go up and look at it, make sure it's okay, before you take me in. I'm begging you."

"I think you oughta kick his ass all the way down that hill," Earl snapped.

The sheriff was staring at Rick. "Hell, all right," he said, disgusted. He grabbed Rick's arm in an iron grip and half-hauled him up the steep slope toward the turnpike apron.

The traffic on the turnpike past the wide apron was heavy now with commuter traffic hurtling southeast toward Pittsburgh. The apron was empty except for the trash barrel, the emergency telephone, Rick's Harley, and the woman in denims sprawled on the ground beside it.

Rick's heart nearly stopped. Figuring on it—hoping desperately for it—was one thing, but seeing it in the flesh was another. The sheriff, after stopping dead still for a second, strode over to her. She lay on her back, wearing glasses, but her face was pasty white, her jaw clenched. Her right leg was bent at a curious angle below the knee, her jeans bulging there. Compound fracture, Rick thought; the bone sticking right through the skin.

Rick drew a deep, deep breath of sweet, noxious highway air and said, "Sheriff, I believe you know Ruth Stewart."

The sheriff hooked his big hands on his gunbelt and barked down at the injured woman, "Then who the hell was that down in the house?"

Ruth's eyes, the eyes of a cornered animal, went from the sheriff to Rick and back again. She didn't answer. Rick, wondering what in the world she was thinking, said, "Her sister. Ruth's adopted, see. Guess nobody around here knew that since she's from upstate. For years now she's been trying to

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find her sister. Lawyers, detectives. Her private obsession. I guess she found her some time back. And discovered her sister was an identical twin. Or maybe she knew that before, but it doesn't matter.

"She's been wanting to take off from here. She knew I'd be here for her birthday." The sheriff turned slowly, facing Rick. "Probably what she did was, she didn't tell anybody right away she'd found her sister. She waited till yesterday and brought her down here from wherever. Got her to the house, then killed her and the whole family last night, figuring on framing me for it and taking off on my bike while you guys took me to jail. Nice clean getaway for her. Brand new life and no one would even think to look for her."

"Doug," Ruth said to the sheriff in a dry, weak voice, "this man . . . broke in on me and my family this morning. I . . . got away before he could kill me, too."

Rapid footsteps pounded from behind as the deputy, Earl, ran up the hill to the apron. "Sherf . . . what the hell?" He skidded to a stop and stared at the injured woman, at Rick.

"Call the highway patrol," the sheriff ordered angrily, looking from Ruth to Rick and back. "This here is their jurisdiction. Move now." The deputy scurried away down the hill. The sheriff looked at Rick and said, "What about this, now?"

What a consummate actress, Rick thought. She could hang me yet, maybe. Better forget all that other. It's you or her now, boy. No quarter given.

Rick said: "Woman down there's wearing Ruth's wedding rings, sheriff. And I think your lab reports'll have some interesting results. Fingerprints. She set it up so I'd pick up the shotgun, so my prints are on that all right. But that's a double-barrelled gun. Only two shots per load. She used five shots. Two reloads and a shell still in the chamber. Her prints are on it. And maybe there's shell casings lying around, with her prints on them." Unwillingly he looked at Ruth. "Bet you didn't think about that." The sheriff's expression was distant. "How'd you know to come out to the house this morning, sheriff?"

"Anonymous phone call."

Rick nodded in the direction of the emergency telephone. "From there," he said with more positiveness then he felt. Jaw clenched, he shook his head at Ruth. "You sure thought this through. You left a note for me to go to the house. Then you hid in the trees up here. When I'd gone down, you came up to the phone and called the cops. Then you cleaned up the dishes and

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utensils and hid them somewhere in the woods, somewhere deep, probably. I'm sure the sheriff's people can find them. As well as the prints you left on the phone."

More deputies were coming up the hill now. Rick heard a distant siren coming down the highway. Ruth, breathing hard, pulled herself to a half-sitting position, favoring her broken leg. Her lips were almost blue against her pasty white, smooth skin. She looked up at Rick. "You knew all along?"

Rick felt very tired. He stared off down the highway, at the stream of cars and trucks roaring free in the wind, and said, "Nah. But something sure felt wrong. Your glasses, for one thing. You're pretty vain, you always wore contacts before. You didn't last night because you had to leave them with your sister's body. And then your spending the night up here, your wanting a campfire. You'd never done those things before because you were afraid of being seen. But it didn't matter last night, because everyone down in the house was dead. Your whole family was dead."

"*His* family," she cut in with venom.

"And your clothes. No gorgeous designer duds this time, you were dressed for the highway. Where you expected to be, right about now. And then you asked me how to start my bike."

"You said it was easy," she said in a rasping voice.

A blue Pennsylvania highway patrol car roared onto the apron, lights flashing. The sheriff issued some quiet orders to Earl and the other deputies, then turned to listen to Rick. "Yeah, I said it was easy, and it is, if you know how. But this is a temperamental old gal. The timing's off, like it usually is when you've got lots of miles on. You have to gauge the compression just right before you kick the starter. Otherwise she'll kick back. Hard." He looked down at her leg. "Hard enough to break something. And toss you right off."

"You're all heart," she said cruelly.

"Tell me about it." He quelled the sudden fierce surge of anger inside him.

"You're just plain dumb lucky, you know that?" the sheriff growled at Rick as they walked out of the sheriff's department in Fernway.

"How's that?" Rick asked as they stepped into the sun. His Harley stood at the curb, fully loaded, ready to go.

"That nonsense about fingerprints on the shotgun shells and stuff. You almost never get usable prints off junk like that.

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What a crock."

Rick mounted the Harley and sat back. No two ways about it, he thought, this is home. "How was I supposed to know? I was playing it by ear. It got her confession though, didn't it? Enough to clear me and hopefully to convict her." He reached down without looking and switched on the ignition. "Am I off your radar screen now, sheriff?"

The sheriff folded his big arms across his chest. "Reckon. We got your deposition, we got some physical evidence, like the twin sister's stiff and Ruth's prints on the phone and her junk, the cooler and wine bottles and stuff. With a smart D.A. and a dumb defense lawyer we might get a plea on one count, anyhow." He watched as Rick checked out the tires, the chain, the clutch and brakes with his practiced eye. Then he said, "Guess with her put away you won't be stopping in these parts any more."

"Guess not," Rick answered shortly. That sums it up, he thought: my life is a growing list of places I don't need to be any more. Well, it's the getting there that counts, not the being there. Too many miles on me now for it to be any other way. Wherever there is now.

He hooked his right foot on the kick starter, pumped it slowly until he found the magic moment when the compression was just right, and then kicked. The big Harley motor roared, a lean, hungry, beautiful sound.

He headed east. The nearest southbound route was Interstate 79, and he'd put up with that till Morgantown, where U.S. 19 would point him straight into warm country. A good day's drive would put him well into Tennessee by sundown.

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FICTION

The Case of the Untidy Golf Cult

by James A. Noble

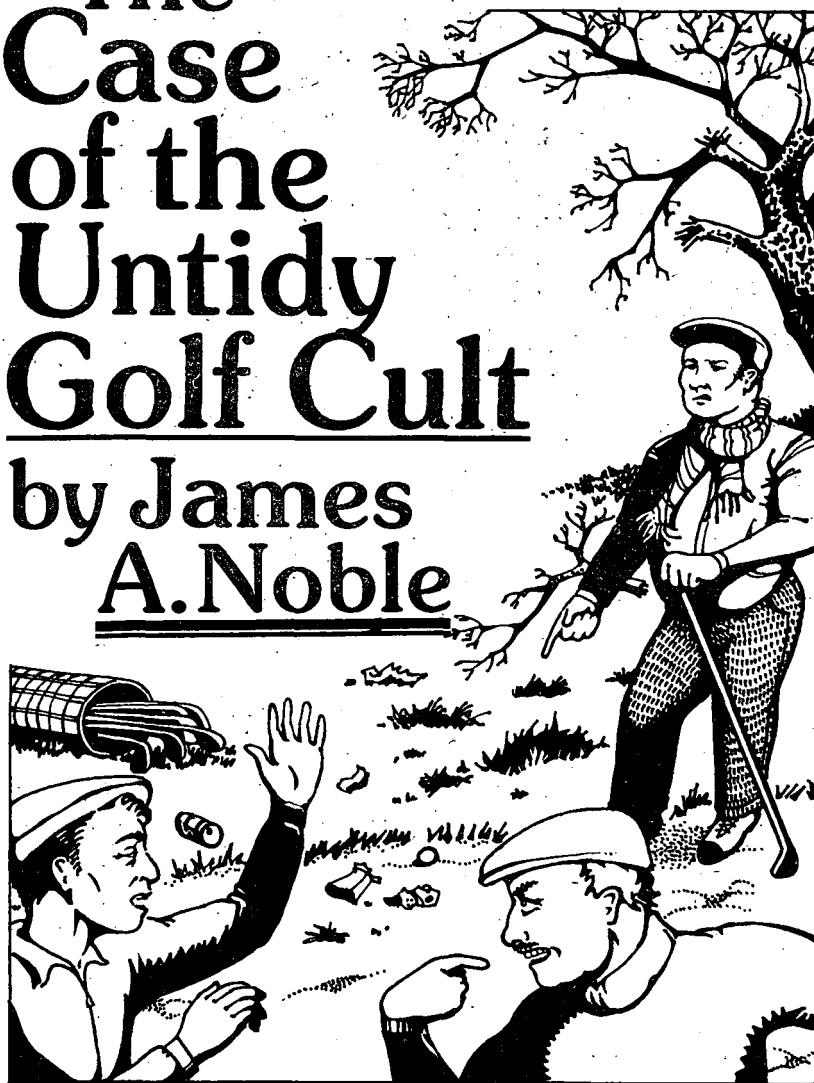


Illustration by Lisa Knouse

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The damage and debris on the sixteenth hole far exceeded anything Terri Scott had witnessed before from the four golf fanatics. To add to her troubles, a cold foggy rain had started.

Who in his right mind plays golf in late winter, she thought bitterly. It took her nearly half an hour to clean up the mess before she moved on to the next hole. She was certain she had seen the worst of their destructive capability until she found the body buried in a shallow grave in a sandtrap behind the seventeenth green. It was Albert Burton, one of the foursome.

The patrol car fishtailed down the wet grass of the seventeenth fairway and turned left on the dogleg leading to the green before sliding to a stop next to the sandtrap.

"Hey, you guys. You're tearing up the course," Terri complained, looking down at the displaced turf behind the rear wheels. "Don't I have enough work to do?"

"Sorry about that." A tall lanky man emerged from the passenger side of the car. "I'll see that the city requisitions a black and white golf cart complete with lights and sirens for the next time we're called here."

Terri grinned.

"You're the greenskeeper who found the body?"

"Yeah. Terri Scott, just call me Terri."

"Detective Sergeant Mark Murphy. Why don't we get in the car out of the rain," said Mark, opening the back door.

Once seated in the car, Terri supplied the detective and his partner with the names of the three players the victim had been with and a description of the car they had driven to the golf course. Mark had his driver, Officer Burk, issue an A.P.B. for all three of them.

"Wait here a moment, Terri," he told her, "and we'll get you back to the clubhouse and into some dry clothes. I just want to take a quick look around."

Mark stepped from the car and walked around the perimeter of the sandtrap, being careful not to destroy any evidence. Two additional units arrived in the meantime. A few minutes later, he returned to the car, and Officer Burk drove them to the clubhouse.

"Feel better?" asked Mark when Terri emerged from the women's locker room.

"Much, thanks." She took a seat at a table in the lounge.

"You seem to know the four golfers fairly well."

"I ought to," replied Terri. "They're the only ones on the course this time of year, and they're nothing but trouble."

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"Give me some details."

"They're fanatics. Steven Windsor, Tommy Miler, Leroy Tennison, and, of course, Albert Burton, our friend in the sandtrap. Every day of every weekend they're out here tearing up the place. They've got some sort of a series of matches going. One time they even played in the middle of a driving snowstorm with orange golf balls. Can you believe it?"

"What do you mean 'tearing up the place'?"

"Tennison is the worst. He missed a three foot putt on the first hole a couple of weeks back and bent the flag into the shape of a pretzel. Miler is almost as bad. I'm sure he was the one who killed a tree one time and left the branches scattered all over the fairway."

"Killed a tree?"

"Yeah. Just a small one. I didn't see it, but I could hear him cussing. Apparently, he sliced his drive and got behind the tree in the rough. When everything quieted down, I went over to take a look. He must have used a three wood on it. Pieces of tree were all over the place."

"You follow them around the course?"

"I used to stay right behind them so I could see what damage I'd have to clean up, but Burton chased me off with a nine iron one day. He claimed that just knowing I was back there threw his game off. Ever since then, I stay one or two holes behind them, out of sight. I find the same thing at every hole. They leave their golf tees lying around, they never replace the divots, the sandtraps are torn up, the flag is never replaced after they've putted, and there are always hundreds of candy bar and sandwich wrappers they've tossed on the ground."

"Same today?"

"Yeah. They made their standard mess through the first sixteen holes, but I've had lots of practice so I can generally clean up as fast as they can mess up. If I hear that I'm getting too close behind them, I just take a short break."

"If you *hear* you're getting close?"

"Sure. They're always yelling and screaming at each other."

"Tell me exactly how you found the body."

"Well, I was doing my usual clean-up number on the seventeenth fairway, and when I reached the dogleg, I just naturally looked over at the green to see what I'd have to do there. You can't see the green until you get past the dogleg, you understand. Anyway, I noticed this unraked mound in the middle of the sandtrap behind the putting surface, so I took the rake out of my maintenance

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cart to smooth it out. One or two swipes and there was Albert. I got on the walkie-talkie, called the clubhouse, and then waited for the police."

"Did you notice the usual disarray on the seventeenth green?"

"No, now that you mention it. Only the body in the sandtrap, and that certainly wasn't usual."

"You said they were playing a series of matches."

"Against each other. I think they've got some sort of big bet going. Every weekend they turn their scorecard into the pro shop. Harry Wilkinson can help you there."

They were interrupted by Officer Burk, who had come in to tell Mark that the three other golfers had been picked up and were being held for questioning. And a golf card with bloodstains on it had been found behind a clump of trees next to a road that paralleled the dogleg of the seventeenth fairway. The lab boys were giving it a good going over.

Mark asked Terri to wait. He wanted, he said, to talk to Harry Wilkinson at the pro shop.

"Terrible thing . . . terrible," said the man behind the counter, after Mark had introduced himself.

"You know what happened, then?"

"Only what Terri told me when she called on the radio. Mr. Burton was my best customer. They're all good customers."

"You see them quite a bit?"

"They're my *only* customers this time of year. If it has to do with golf, they'll buy it . . . and only the best.

"Did you rent them a golf cart this morning?"

"Just Mr. Burton. The others prefer to walk, for the exercise."

"I understand they leave their scorecards with you every time they play?"

"Got 'em right here. They've been playing a series of games against each other for the last ten weekends. Today was to have been the last game in the series. They each initial the scorecard and turn it in to me. I keep a running total of each man's score. They turned in a scorecard for today's game." Harry handed the detective the top card from the stack.

At the top of the card was written "Final Game." Below were hand printed the names of each of the four golfers with their strokes for each hole entered in columns. A subtotal was recorded for the first nine holes and a final score for all eighteen holes. Under the column for "A. Burton," no score was entered for the seventeenth and eighteenth holes. A small penciled-in bracket around his score for the six-

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teenth hole included the notation "Default Loser." At the bottom of the card, along with the totals for the other three players' eighteen holes, was another notation: "Playoff Match Required."

"Why the playoff game?" asked Mark.

"Because they all tied for the series at two over par . . . except for Mr. Burton, of course. They had agreed there would be a sudden death playoff . . ." Wilkinson suddenly realized what he was saying. "I mean, an extra game in the event of a tie at the end."

"How was Burton doing until today?"

Wilkinson looked down at the next card in the stack. "Mr. Burton had a big lead at . . . seven under par. Mr. Tennison was second at even. Miler and Windsor were last at five over."

Mark stared at Wilkinson until the pro shop manager felt obligated to speak.

"Ah, come on. I know they take their game a little too seriously, sergeant, but it's not possible that . . ."

"They use these?" Mark pulled one of many short stubby pencils from a cup beside a stack of blank score cards.

"Yeah, why?"

"I'll be needing all the scorecards," said Mark. He slipped the pencil into his pocket, thanked Wilkinson for his help, and started out.

"Just one . . ." Wilkinson began.

Mark looked over his shoulder, "Yes?"

"Nothing."

"Don't hold anything back. It might be important."

"No . . . no."

Mark paused a few moments but Wilkinson remained silent. "Thanks again," said Mark and walked out of the shop.

"Get what you needed, sergeant?" asked Terri when she saw him returning.

"Enough. I wonder if you would mind going back onto the course with me. I want you to check out something on the eighteenth hole."

"The eighteenth? Sure. Let me get my rain slicker. You can drop me off afterwards at the seventeenth green. I've got to fetch my maintenance cart anyway."

"One quick question, Terri. Do you think any of those three men would be capable of murder over a golf match?"

She stopped midstep on her way to the locker room and turned. "Yeah . . . any or all of them."

At the eighteenth hole, Terri and Mark got out of the patrol car and walked the length of the fairway.

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"One thing for sure," said Terri, "Windsor, Miler, and Tennison never played this hole today. Everything is neat as a pin, just like I left it last week."

They returned to the car and drove to the seventeenth green. The body had since been removed. While Terri took the maintenance cart back to the clubhouse, Mark examined the sandtrap more closely and then walked over to the road where the lab boys were just finishing up on the golf cart. In spite of the rain, a bloodstain was visible on the back of the cart. He returned to the patrol car. As he and Officer Burk left the precincts of the club and turned onto the highway, he spotted the yellow slicker of Terri Scott through the thin line of trees separating the golf course and the road. He told Burk to ease the car onto the shoulder. Terri was scurrying about picking up trash and repairing divots in the turf. Mark looked ahead at the first hole green. The flag was lying on the ground.

"Drive up the road a little way and pull off again," said Mark. They stopped opposite the third hole fairway. Mark got out. Paper and trash could be seen all along the fairway. Golf tees lay around the tee-off markers. This flag too was lying on the green, and one of the sandtraps was a mess. Mark decided to walk the course.

The pattern of disarray and debris continued until Mark reached the twelfth hole. There the fairway and green were perfectly arranged and clean. The same was true for the thirteenth through sixteenth holes. Mark returned to the patrol car.

When they arrived at Police Central, Sergeant Charlie Osborn was waiting.

"What you got, Charlie?"

Charlie leafed through some papers. "Steven Windsor, thirty-seven, single, self-employed, garage owner," he read aloud. "Thomas Miler, thirty-seven, married . . . wife's name, Loretta, accountant for General Produce here in the city. Leroy Tennison, thirty-two, divorced, dock foreman for Seafreight, Inc., former wife's name, Margaret."

"And our victim, Albert Burton?"

"Single, thirty, no visible means of support. But get this. A couple of months back, Albert Burton was thrown out of the Southside Country Club on the other side of the county for hustling. Guess who he lifted a couple of thousand from? Bernard Windsor, Steven Windsor's brother."

"Interesting," said Mark. "Any preliminary lab or coroner's report?"

"The coroner says . . ." Charlie hesitated as he flipped

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more papers . . . "Albert Burton, approximately two hundred twenty pounds, apparently died of multiple blows to the cranium with a club-like instrument. A few of the blows left shaft-like marks on the victim's head. . . . Golf club?"

"Maybe. Can the lab confirm that?"

"Let's see . . ." More flipping. "Nope. They've only just got the four bags of clubs down to the lab."

Mark frowned. "Four bags?"

"Yeah. The police found Windsor's sedan parked in front of the Hole in One Bar just a short distance from the country club. All three men were in the bar. There were four golf bags in the trunk, one of them with Albert Burton's nametag on it."

They were interrupted by a phone call for Mark.

"Detective Murphy?" said the voice on the phone. "This is Harry Wilkinson. From the pro shop."

"Yes, Mr. Wilkinson."

"I wish I didn't have to tell you. I've just got to clear my conscience. She's really a good kid."

"Who, Mr. Wilkinson?"

"Terri Scott. I was looking out of the back window of the shop shortly after those three guys returned from their game, and I saw her drive up in her cart, take Steve Windsor aside, and give him a big wad of bills. She looked scared. Then she drove off back toward the golf course. I watched him count it. Lots of tens and twenties. Must have been close to a thousand dollars. I don't see how she could have saved up that much money on her salary. There must be a reasonable explanation. But with this murder and all, I thought I had to tell you."

"Just keep it to yourself, Mr. Wilkinson," Mark told him. "I have a pretty good idea of what was going on. And don't worry." He hung up and turned to Charlie. "I'll start the interrogation with Leroy Tennison."

Leroy Tennison was tall and muscular, providing credence to his story of having worked his way up to dock foreman the hard way. But, he told them, he had culture. "That's why I'm a member of the club. Besides it's a release for me. All that pressure I'm under, running the docks. It builds up in me. I can hardly wait for the weekend so I can get that golf club in my hands and murder the little white ball."

Mark stared calmly at him.

"I said little white ball . . . little white ball," Tennison shouted, leaning forward in his chair.

"Take it easy," Mark said. "No one's accusing you of anything. I understand you were

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competing against each other."

"Yeah. Before I found out Burton had been murdered, I thought he had just walked away. I couldn't understand that because he had a seven stroke lead over any of us. Not only that, he left his brand new bag and clubs lying on the ground."

"Did you see him walk away?" asked Mark.

"No, but let me explain." Tennison paused to arrange his thoughts. "The seventeenth hole where Albert disappeared is a long par five with a sharp dogleg to the left near the end of the fairway. You can't see the green from the tee because of the trees, you know. Anyhow, Albert is first up and POW . . ." Tennison jumped out of his chair and swung a make-believe club. "He hits the longest drive I've ever seen. From where I stood it looked like he might have driven past the dogleg if he cleared those trees. Albert was beside himself. He hops in his golf cart and heads down the fairway, laughing all the way, before any of us gets a chance to tee off. Nobody tries to stop him. He's so far ahead in score, it didn't make any difference; besides, I think Miler was looking to see if he could pop his drive off the back of Albert's head." Tennison again realized the implication of his words. "Now, wait a minute. I didn't mean it like that. Tommy would no more try to hurt Albert than I would."

"I understand," said Mark. "Go on."

"Anyway, it's do or die, so the rest of us try for the long drive and end up short and in the rough on the left side." Tennison sat back down.

"How long was Burton out of your sight?" asked Mark.

"He had the cart and the rest of us were walking. I was first to reach the dogleg after Albert. He wasn't out of my sight for more than five or six minutes. I saw his clubs lying on the ground about fifty yards from the green, but no cart and no Albert. I looked for him for about five minutes until Tommy and Steve caught up. We waited a while and when Albert didn't show, we figured he had defaulted. We picked up his clubs and carried them with us so they wouldn't get ripped off, played the rest of the game, turned in our scores, and went to the Hole in One."

"And you never saw the golf cart again?" asked Mark.

"No."

"Did the sandtraps look at all unusual to you?"

"No. What sandtraps? I don't go around studying sandtraps."

"You finished the game?"

"Yeah."

"Do you bet on the games?"

"Just a couple hundred."

"For the series?"

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"Well . . . per game."

"Per person?"

Tennison nodded.

"Cumulative? All goes to the final winner?"

"Hey, look. It's a friendly wager . . . our relaxation," said Tennison, defensively.

"And you, Miler, and Windsor just happened to end up in a three-way tie for the money, with Burton out of the way."

"Look, sergeant, that's just the way it happened . . . a coincidence. If it makes you feel any better, we'll donate a fourth of the bet to his sister or something."

Mark opened the door to the interrogation room and called the officer standing outside. "Get this . . . man out of here and bring in Windsor."

Steven Windsor claimed that he and Miler turned the corner of the fairway and found Leroy Tennison waiting for them. His story supported Tennison's with one notable addition.

"Leroy really acted funny. After Burton hit that unbelievable drive, we were all just standing around feeling disgusted when all of a sudden, as Burton's cart is about to disappear around the dogleg, Leroy tees up real fast and smacks a short drive into the left rough. He doesn't even take any practice swings. Then he picks up his bag and goes hustling up the fairway. I mean the guy is almost running. He goes right past his ball and around the dogleg."

Mark jotted down a note. "You know, of course, that Albert Burton was a golf hustler by profession?"

"Sure, I do. He cheated my brother out of some money over at Southside a couple of months back, but I figured I could beat him."

"The scorecards for your matches don't reflect that."

"He was probably cheating me, too."

"You would have done anything to beat Burton after he cheated your brother, wouldn't you?"

"You mean kill him? No way."

"How about doing some cheating yourself?" Mark suggested.

"I never cheated anybody."

"But you tried today, the day Burton died."

Windsor fell silent.

Tommy Miler might have been the most nervous of the three or he might just have been cold—he was a slight man and was still wearing damp clothing from his golf game in the rain. In any case, his testimony jibed with that of the others, but like Steve Windsor, he had something interesting to add.

"If you want your murderer

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or murderess, if you prefer, you'll go pick up that greenskeeper at the club. Tracy . . . Teresa. What's her name," said Miler.

"Terri Scott?" asked Mark.

"That's the one. She's normally behind us somewhere working the fairways and greens. Well, she was staying ahead of us today. I saw her trying to hide in the bushes and trees along the greens we were shooting. Saw her three times on the first nine."

"Did you see her on the seventeenth?"

"No, but who else could have done Albert in and still had time to hide the body before Leroy turned the dogleg except someone who was hiding in the bushes waiting for him? She did it all right."

Charlie had news—or no news—from the lab when the detective completed his interrogations. They had checked all the clubs, the golf bags, and their contents. There were no bloodstains or hair fragments anywhere to incriminate any of the three golf players.

"The clubs were complete sets, no missing clubs?" asked Mark.

"Complete sets," replied Charlie. "Every type of club imaginable was in every bag. We have men searching all along the seventeenth fairway. If there's any extra club out there, they'll find it."

"Any indication one of the clubs had been recently cleaned?"

"Negative," said Charlie, shaking his head.

"No bark or wood fragments from the autopsy indicating a stick was used as the weapon?"

"Nope."

"How about the car? Did you check the lug wrench?"

"Checked the whole car and negative. Sergeant, I talked to the coroner myself and he tells me the wounds on the skull look like they were made with some sort of metal club and a golf club is an especially likely candidate."

"Let the three suspects go. We've got nothing on them," sighed Mark.

"Illegal gambling . . . and you say they did lie about finishing the game today," offered Charles.

"I'm looking for a murderer. I want proof that will stand up in court and that isn't enough. Let them go and give them back their golf equipment if the lab is through with it."

The day of Burton's burial was overcast and drizzly. Mark arrived at the cemetery just as the services were ending. He spotted a small group that included Tennison, Miler, Windsor, and a frail young woman carrying a bright

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yellow umbrella. Off by herself was Margaret Tennison, Leroy Tennison's ex-wife, a big, sturdy woman he recognized from her description. He walked over.

"Mrs. Tennison? Detective Sergeant Mark Murphy."

"Call me Marge or Ms. Wilcox, my maiden name. Pleased to meet you. I heard you were the investigating officer."

"You were a personal friend of Albert Burton's?"

"Heck no," she laughed. "I just came here to make sure they dug the hole deep enough. I'm a little surprised they buried him here, though."

"How's that?"

"I figured they'd plant him off to the side of the eighteenth fairway with a tombstone that read 'Here lies Albert Burton. In the rough again.' "

"You didn't care for Mr. Burton, then?" asked Mark.

"He got Leroy hooked on that stupid game."

"You took exception to your husband's interest in golf?"

"Exception? Ha! I divorced the big bozo because of golf. I won't have anything to do with him. We don't even talk or see each other any more. If I had known golf was going to turn into an obsession with him, I would have thrown that little pipsqueak Burton right out of the house when he talked Leroy into taking up the game. At first, it didn't seem so bad. Leroy was out of my hair and Loretta, that's Tommy Miler's wife, and I would get together and go shopping for the day. After a couple of weekends, he started coming home late and leaving early in the morning. He'd either be on the golf course or sitting in a bar somewhere talking about golf. I couldn't take it any longer so I divorced the bum. Cost me a fortune. I fixed him, though. The day I walked out of the house I stuck one of those trick exploding golf balls in his bag. Brother, did he get mad. Blew up right in the middle of one of his big matches with the rest of those idiots. I never laughed so hard in my life. They even penalized him a stroke," she added, starting a deep, loud laugh that turned many of the nearby mourners' heads. "Blew the head clean off his four iron. I bet he nearly had puppies. He got even, though, he left me broke."

"Wasn't there a satisfactory settlement?"

"You kidding? Being a golf widow isn't extremely good grounds for divorce. Besides, I think my lawyer and the judge both played the game, so I didn't get much sympathy . . . or money. The real irony is the job I had to take to keep from starving to death after the divorce."

"How's that?"

"I took a job as a secretary for a company that manufactures

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golf bags. Can you beat that?"

"That's pretty ironic all right," said Mark.

"I'm not bitter at Burton, though. Oh, no. In fact, I donated a golf bag so they'd have something to bury that oversized rodent in."

The three golfers were leaving in a car. The slim young woman with the umbrella was approaching.

Marge leaned towards Mark. "Here comes Loretta Miler now. Let's drop the golf subject. She's so easily upset."

"Marge," said Loretta as she came up, "will you give me a lift home? Tommy and the boys are going to go play some golf."

Marge shook her head. "Give me strength."

"Tommy said it's a kind of memorial game . . . in remembrance of Albert," said Loretta. She looked hurt.

"Of course I'll give you a ride home, sweetie. I'm just a little shocked," Marge replied. "Honestly, Loretta, you spoil Tommy, letting him trip off to the links all the time. Don't you ever get lonely?"

"It could be worse," Loretta said defensively. "It's better than a husband who's a drunkard or chases loose women."

Marge looked around. "Well, everyone is leaving. I guess the fun's over. Nice to have met you, Mark."

"Same here." Mark walked back to his car. Through the rain-spattered windshield, he saw Marge and Loretta's sedan stop at the cemetery exit, sit for about a half minute, and then suddenly turn left down the highway. That's odd, he thought. According to the addresses he had been given for Mrs. Tennison and the Milers, the car should have turned right toward town. There was nothing to the left . . . except the golf course.

"Of course . . . of course," he mumbled to himself, as he started the car and headed for the lab at Police Central. On the way in, he radioed a police unit near the golf course, reeled off a list of names, and instructed the officers to hold those persons at the clubhouse until he arrived. Then he called Charlie and told him to meet him at the lab.

There he checked the inventory list the technicians had made for the golf equipment they had tested for the blood and hair samples. What he didn't find pleased him.

When Mark and Charlie arrived at the clubhouse, they found everyone gathered in the lounge. Steven Windsor was nervously playing with a golf ball while Loretta and Thomas Miler sat on the lounge sofa, clutching hands. Leroy and Marge Tennison were standing on opposite sides of the room

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exchanging occasional scowls, and Terri Scott and Harry Wilkinson looked on from either side of the door leading to the pro shop.

"I suppose you know you ruined the First Annual Albert Burton Memorial Golf Match?" cracked Leroy Tennison.

"I suggest you sit down, Mr. Tennison," said Mark. "Your turn will be coming up shortly."

Tennison looked unsure of himself—which was somewhat out of character—and eased himself down into a chair.

"There's a murderer among you . . ." began Mark, reaching over and pulling a putter by its shaft from one of the three golf bags leaning against the wall. Windsor dropped the golf ball he was playing with.

". . . and I know who it is. Hmm . . . wrong one," said Mark, looking at the putter. "Yours, Mr. Windsor?"

Windsor nodded.

"The difficulty in solving this case arose when many of you, for your own reasons, unknowingly set yourselves up as suspects. I'll start with the seemingly harmless little conspiracy by Tennison, Windsor and Miler to fake their scores to indicate a three-way tie after Burton disappeared."

A trio of objections arose, Windsor's among the loudest. "You can't prove that."

Mark held up a scorecard and a pencil. "These little pencils you gentlemen use to keep score dull pretty fast. When you keep a running score, you enter the score under each man's name as he finishes each hole. That means the numbers entered for the initial holes are sharp and clear while the penciled scores for the final holes will be less distinct and wider.

"This is the scorecard from the game you played the day Burton disappeared. The numbers are clear and distinct under the first player's name and become duller as you approach the fourth player's score. In other words, the numbers were entered in column fashion, not across. It's impossible to keep score in that manner. This scorecard was faked to eliminate Burton and give each of the remaining players another chance to win a playoff game and, I would estimate, as much as eighteen thousand dollars. It suggests a conspiracy to commit murder for profit."

"Twenty-one thousand dollars," corrected Miler, "But you've got to believe I never conspired to kill Burton, only to fake the score. Leroy talked me into that."

"Honest. He's telling the truth. There was no murder conspiracy," added Windsor.

Leroy Tennison gave Miler a hard stare, but said nothing.

" 'Honest' is a strange word

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to be coming from you, Mr. Windsor," commented the detective. "And while I already know you three men did not plan to kill Burton, I also know that you, Mr. Windsor, made a separate deal with Terri Scott. One that could well suggest your involvement in the murder."

"I swear I didn't do anything,"said the young greenskeeper.

Mark set Windsor's putter on a nearby table and turned to Terri. "Windsor paid you somewhere around a thousand dollars to hide near the holes they were playing and sabotage Burton's golf shots whenever you could remain unseen. Put his golf balls behind trees if he hit in the rough, throw his shots into the sandtraps, that sort of thing. At the same time, you were to place Windsor's ball in the most advantageous position. The plan failed for some reason, and you gave up when you realized Burton was too far ahead."

"Where'd you ever get that idea?" sneered Windsor.

"Miss Scott claimed she always followed you men through the holes, cleaning up after you," said Mark. "Yet that day there was no indication she did any straightening at all on the first eleven holes. She was too busy staying ahead of the game. She wasn't, by the way, wearing her yellow slicker, in spite of the rain. She could hardly have expected to remain hidden wearing bright yellow. It was the twelfth hole where she gave up trying to rig the match."

"They hit their shots too well. I couldn't do anything without being spotted." Terri was looking at the floor.

"Well, I saw you," said Miler, shaking his finger. "And you waited for Albert on the seventeenth green and you killed him."

"Hold it, Miler," warned Mark. "You're out of line. I know Miss Scott went back to cleaning up after the foursome somewhere around the twelfth hole. Later, after the game, she paid back the money Mr. Windsor had given her. Finding the body frightened you, didn't it, young lady? You almost became a prime suspect in the murder of Burton."

"I'm sorry," she said.

"So, you'd cheat us, would you, Steve?" said Tennison.

Mark walked over to the three golf bags again. "Mr. Windsor was obsessed only with beating Burton. His brother was hustled by him."

"It's true, Leroy," confirmed Windsor. "I told Terri not to touch anyone's shot but mine and Burton's. I didn't care about the money. I just wanted to beat that cheat."

Mark pulled a putter by its

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shaft from another golf bag.

"What're you doing?" said Tennison, rising from his seat.

Mark ignored the question. "Mr. Tennison was just as concerned about Burton's cheating as you were, Mr. Windsor, except for a different reason. That's why he was in such a hurry to get around the dogleg on the seventeenth and catch Burton in the act of changing his ball placement . . . Well, I picked the wrong one again," said Mark, looking at the second putter.

"Of course, I was hoping to catch him cheating," said Tennison. "Throw him out of the series and give the rest of us another chance for the money. So what? . . . Give me that."

"Yours?" said Mark, holding the putter up to Tennison.

"Yeah." Tennison snatched the club from Mark's hand.

"You became my number one suspect, Mr. Tennison." Mark returned to the three golf bags. "You're about the only one big enough to lift Burton into and out of the golf cart, for one thing. But the strongest evidence of your guilt was opportunity. You were the only one who had the opportunity to be alone with Burton, kill him, and bury him in the sandtrap before Miler and Windsor turned the dogleg. You talked them into faking the scorecard because you had to keep them from playing out the seventeenth hole. One of them might have pitched into the sandtrap and found the body."

"I . . . I didn't kill Burton," Tennison said, sitting down again and looking straight ahead at nothing in particular.

"I know you didn't," agreed Mark, turning to the one golf bag from which he had not removed a putter. "Now, let me see. Mr. Windsor, the clubs on the end were yours, and Mr. Tennison, the middle bag of clubs is yours. . . . That means the clubs in this bag are yours. Right, Mr. Miler?"

Miler turned white. "So?"

Mark gently pushed each of the clubs around in the bag. "The coroner was sure it was a club of some kind, yet none of the clubs in the four players' bags revealed any trace of the victim's blood; none of the clubs from the complete sets was missing, and none had been cleaned to hide anything. Therefore, we must assume either it was not a club from any player's bag or it wasn't a golf club at all. If it wasn't a golf club, what could it have been? What else would a bunch of players—players who buy everything associated with the game—put into their bags that could be a possible murder weapon? What would anyone who consistently plays in late winter and early spring be sure

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to carry along?"

Mark plucked a putter by its shaft from Miler's bag, only it wasn't a putter at all. It was a bright yellow golf umbrella.

"Quite functional, you see. Tightly wrapped so its covering won't interfere with returning golf clubs to the bag; heavy handle so a player may set it on the ground to take a shot without worrying about the wind associated with a rainstorm blowing it away . . . like this one with a handle in the shape of a putter's head." The detective turned the umbrella around so he was grasping the pointed end. "And a dandy murder weapon."

He walked over to Thomas Miler and his wife and held the umbrella out. "Care to demonstrate how you held it when you bashed Albert Burton's skull in?" he said calmly.

Tommy Miler jumped to his feet. "That's insane. All the rest of the players have golf umbrellas like mine."

"Yes," agreed Mark. "But you were the only one who didn't have yours on the day of the murder. That's why it wasn't in your golf bag when you were picked up. That's why your clothes were damp when you were taken in for interrogation."

"If I hadn't brought it with me, how could it have been used to kill . . . " Miler suddenly stopped in mid-sentence. His eyes shone big as half dollars in his small face. He turned his head slowly towards Loretta.

"That's right, Tommy," said Mark. "Your wife was bringing it to you because she had used it and forgotten to return it to your golf bag, just like she was using it today at the funeral. Marge Tennison had no reason to drive to the golf course today. She hated golf and wasn't even seeing her ex-husband." He turned to Loretta Miler. "Mrs. Tennison drove to the golf course because you asked her to. You wanted to give your husband his golf umbrella."

The expression of a helpless, innocent woman had disappeared from Loretta's face. She remained silent.

"You also drove to the course to take it to him the day Burton was killed," continued Mark, undaunted. "You figured he'd be somewhere along the back nine, so you drove along the side road paralleling the end of the seventeenth fairway and spotted Albert Burton. Then you killed him."

Loretta Miler's first words came quickly. "And I just picked up a man weighing over two hundred pounds and dumped him in the cart," she said, showing her slim arms.

"No, not alone," said Mark. "Leroy Tennison helped you."

Tennison looked up quickly

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from his seat but said nothing. He fiddled with the putter he had taken from Mark earlier.

Mark walked over and stood in front of him. "Mrs. Miler wasn't strong enough to do that by herself. Burton's golf bag lying in the fairway and the bloodstains on the back of the golf cart convinced me that you helped her dispose of the body. The golf cart is designed to hold two players and two sets of clubs. If either you or Mrs. Miler had acted alone, you would have naturally put the body in one seat of the cart to move it to the sandtrap for burial, but you took the clubs out of the back of the cart and laid them on the ground. Why?" Mark paused a moment before answering his own question.

"Because there wasn't enough room for you, Mrs. Miler, Burton's body, and his golf clubs. You knew time was at a premium. Miler and Windsor would be coming around the corner in a few minutes. You needed the cart to get the body to the sandtrap, but you also needed Mrs. Miler to drive the cart away quickly while you buried Burton. So you removed Burton's golf bag and put the body on the back of the cart where the clubs are normally carried. That's how the bloodstains got there.

"Your motive wasn't entirely clear at first," continued Mark. "It wasn't the bet money, else why would you talk Windsor and Miler into faking a score that made you all even. You were clearly in second place, right behind Burton, and therefore next in line for the winnings. I can think of only one reason why you helped Mrs. Miler hide the body. Perhaps it would interest your former wife?"

Tennison had assumed the posture of a whipped dog. He suddenly grabbed the putter in his big hands, bent it in half as if it were made of paper, and dropped it to the floor.

"The game . . . the game," he growled under his breath. "I couldn't stop. I couldn't help myself. My obsession caused me to lose the only thing I really loved . . . my wife."

"Oh, Leroy . . . " cried Marge Tennison.

She went over to his chair and knelt beside it.

He took a deep breath. "When I got around the dogleg that day, I saw Loretta standing over Burton, holding the bloody umbrella. I'll never forget the expression on her face. It was the same one Marge wore the day she told me she was leaving me over a year ago. Suddenly I realized what had been happening to me . . . to all of us." He aimed the last few words at Miler. "Burton was scum. I did it for you, Tommy. Loretta and I promised each other you would

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never find out what happened that day."

"That leaves us with your motive, Mrs. Miler," said Mark, turning to her. "The blows were repeated and excessive. I believe, struck in anger."

Loretta Miler spoke softly. "When I saw Albert on the fairway, I walked over with my husband's umbrella. He didn't see me."

Her head dropped into her hands. "He was picking his ball out of the rough and throwing it onto the fairway. He was cheating . . . cheating Tommy and the others. I don't know what came over me. I ran up behind him and swung the umbrella as hard as I could . . . I couldn't stop. I just saw red."

She was weeping.

"Book 'em," said Mark.

While Leroy Tennison and Loretta Miler were read their rights, Charlie Osborne spoke to the detective.

"There's something I don't understand," said Charlie. "We both saw the inventory sheets from the lab and knew that Miler was the only one missing the umbrella. How come you went through the other golf bags?"

"You might say I was being dramatic," sighed Mark. "But in truth, I was showing my prejudice."

"How so?"

"I admit to developing a dislike for Burton and his type—and to feeling sorry for Mrs. Miler. I had hoped that my searching through the golf bags would give her the opportunity to realize I was onto the true story so that she might confess before I had to reveal the whole . . . "

Mark was interrupted by a scuffle. Marge Tennison was holding a heavy glass ashtray in one hand and Thomas Miler's shirt front in the other. Only a tenacious grip by a patrolman and the handcuffed Leroy Tennison was preventing her from putting the ashtray in firm contact with Miler's scalp.

"You sicko!" she was yelling. "What do you mean you'll go down to see your wife at the police station as soon as you finish the golf game!"

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FICTION

The Matchmaker

by Bruce Dettman and Michael Bedford



Mildred's legs hurt worse than usual that night. Mostly in the knees and ankles. Her damned "arthur-ritis" acting up again, making each step and every movement a torture. It wasn't just her legs, of course. Dull pain throbbed persistently in her gnarled hands, her stooped back, and practically every other part of her body. But that night it was her legs that hurt most.

It didn't matter, though. Not any more. No matter how miserable she felt, she had to go on working. After all, there was no one else to come in the morning and open the laundromat, to keep an eye

Illustration by Nick Cuti

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out for vandals and troublemakers, to clean up the place at the end of a long, dirty day. She was all alone.

Of course, when Chuck was alive things had been different. He used to run the place almost all by himself. Back then they had even been able to hire a young man to do most of the harder work. There'd been several, but she remembered the last one the best. George, his name was. Such a nice, reliable, friendly young man.

But that was a long time ago, she thought as she eased her pain-wracked body into a chair by the wall, resting the plastic clothes basket she had been lugging across the room on her lap. George had quit. And soon after that Chuck had his first stroke.

Only fifty-two when he died, and such a robust, young-seeming man, her Chuck. Her poor, sweet Chuck.

If only her legs didn't hurt so much, Mildred thought, she could handle the work so much easier. The right one was bad enough, but at least when she rested it seemed to improve. Not so with the left. No matter what she tried—rest, massage, soaking in a hot tub, keeping it elevated for hours on end—nothing seemed to alleviate the tormenting pain.

But Mildred knew she couldn't afford to waste time feeling sorry for herself. Not with so much work to do that night, and tomorrow being Saturday and all. Weekends meant a flood of long-haired college kids pouring in to do their laundry. Tossing around the already tattered magazines. Banging on the soft drink dispenser. And beating their fists on the poor old coin machine when it didn't dispense their change fast enough. She was like that old coin machine! Old and broken down and no longer working nearly fast enough. Which reminded her . . .

Mildred arose, stiffly, slowly, painfully, and set the plastic basket on the floor. The magazine tidying came next, she decided, trying to keep the routine of her activities clear in her mind. Limping to the redwood tables and benches spaced down the middle of the room between the banks of washers and dryers, she piled into neat stacks the worn copies of *Cosmopolitan, Time,* and *Playboy* and threw the bunch of day old newspapers into the storage room. After that she emptied the ashtrays of their accumulated filth.

Across from where she toiled the row of gleaming washing machines, their square grinning faces watching her every movement, mocked her. They always mocked her. Especially at night, when she was alone.

("Look at that ugly, stupid old woman!" they said to themselves, even though they knew very well that she could hear them. "Beat-

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ing her brains out trying to keep everything going and nobody caring at all. In a few years she'll be as dead as her beloved husband, who left her all alone with us. But *we'll* still be here, after she's in her grave too . . .")

"Shut up, you goddamned machines!" she spat out. "I shoulda been rid of you a long time ago!"

She *would* have been rid of them, too, if only Chuck hadn't died. He wanted to sell the laundromat and get back into the hardware business. He often confessed to her that it'd been a mistake to buy the 'mat in the first place—too much maintenance, not enough income, too many complaints and equipment breakdowns to worry about. Chuck had just about managed to save up enough money so that Mildred and he were free and clear when he had his first stroke, right in the laundromat. His long hospital treatments had eaten deeply into their nest egg. And when he finally died the funeral expenses took care of the rest. All she had left was the laundromat.

("Such a good, dear, loving husband, your Chuck!" the mechanical monsters jeered at her. "Leaving you to run this crummy place all by yourself. A real sweetheart . . .")

She refused to pay them any more attention. When she finished her tidying up, she decided it was time to mop the floor. After that she could put her aching legs up for a while. No one was likely to show up as late as it was tonight, especially with it raining so hard. Except, that was, for George and Ann. They hadn't missed a Friday night in several weeks.

Mildred looked at the scarred, dirty linoleum around her and decided the mopping could wait until she had a candy bar. She put a quarter into the vending machine, selected a Three Musketeers, and sat down in a chair to nibble at it. She never really bit into things any more because her teeth seemed to give way whenever she sank them into anything the least resistant. The few she had left wouldn't last much longer, anyway. So she was careful just to nibble at what she ate, like the candy bar. Even so it tasted delicious. Her sweet tooth was the one pleasure in Mildred's life that still remained. Everything else had vanished—her looks, her health, her hopes, her Chuck. Everything but her sweet tooth.

("Look at her sitting there, enjoying that candy bar, when she should be cleaning us!" the machines said indignantly. "She ought to be ashamed of herself!")

Mildred was not ashamed. Not the least bit. The candy bar tasted very good indeed. She smiled as she continued to nibble, her soft

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yellow teeth probing through the layer of chocolate into the soft interior. Then she glanced at the machines. They weren't grinning any longer. They weren't mocking her. No . . . the machines were very unhappy at that moment. They always were on those rare occasions when Mildred sat down and enjoyed a candy bar or can of soda pop. Well, that was just too bad about the machines, Mildred thought vengefully. She couldn't have cared less. Served them right for saying such bad things about her Chuck.

She finished the bar, and felt guilty. She really oughtn't to treat herself to so many of them, not if she wished to postpone the decaying of the rest of her pitiful teeth. But they tasted *sooo* good, and the sight of her enjoying them annoyed the machines so . . .

. . . Those *awful* machines!

The rain picked up outside, and a strong wind hurled it, rattling violently, against the big plate glass window. The awning slapped and billowed in the night as the storm played with it. Out beyond the parking lot, car lights occasionally came into view, stealing through the heavy downpour and into the laundromat. But none of them turned into the lot and stopped. No one toted his dirty laundry in to wash and dry. She remained alone, with the machines.

Perhaps even Ann and George would not come in tonight because of the rain, she thought with something akin to panic. But no. She really ought to know better than that by now. They would come . . . they were sure to come. Hadn't it rained nearly as hard on Friday night two weeks before, and hadn't they showed up anyway?

It was odd, Mildred thought, that such a pretty girl as Ann never had a date on Friday nights, but spent them at the 'mat instead. But she had explained all about that one night *(hadn't she?),* the time when Mildred had to help her with the coin machine. They'd got to talking, afterwards. And Ann had told her that she was a nurse at a convalescent hospital, and about the only time she could do her laundry was on Friday nights.

Mildred remembered happily that night, when the two of them sat down to talk. Ann had even bought her a grape soda, and they had chatted and laughed, and she had told the girl all about her Chuck and the laundromat and her arthur-ritis and lots of other things. Goodness, but weren't those nasty old machines upset *then,* seeing her have such a wonderful time. It was just too bad she neglected to ask Ann what her real name was. Or perhaps she had, and then forgotten it. Goodness knew, she forgot so many things

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these days. In one ear and out the other, with nothing stopping them in between. But *Ann* suited her. If God had ever blessed Mildred with a daughter of her own, she would have named her Ann. Yes, the name suited her perfectly. She was such a pretty girl, so clean and nicely dressed and decent looking. Ann never showed up at the 'mat with straggly, uncombed hair, or dressed in dirty jeans and ponchos; the way so many girls did nowadays. She knew how to present herself, that was for certain. Her parents had brought her up right.

Just like George. Mildred didn't know his real name, either. She hadn't even had a chance to ask, for an opportunity to talk to him had never come up. But he reminded her so of the nice young man who had worked for them once, and his name was George. So the new young man became George also. He wasn't nearly as friendly as Ann; in fact he wasn't friendly at all. He was very quiet and stand-offish, especially when there were lots of people in doing their washing. But George was obviously a nice, well-bred, cleancut boy. She could tell by the way he dressed and groomed himself. He was clean shaven and kept his hair at a presentable length; none of that long, filthy stuff or those horrible beards.

George hadn't been coming in for as long as Ann had. And Mildred was positive that she was the real reason he kept bringing his wash in on Friday nights. She'd watch him as he would sneak a look at the girl from time to time out of the corner of his eye. She knew that he was just dying to talk to Ann, to approach her and strike up a conversation, perhaps to ask her for a date. But the poor boy was just too shy. It was funny and sad at the same time, watching them; both pretending not to notice each other, while one secretly hoped the other would take the initiative. And when accidentally their gazes met, and they both turned away in embarrassment—goodness,it was funny. So funny.

Now that her chocolate was finished, Mildred no longer had an excuse to avoid mopping the floor. Thunder rumbled and the awning slapped in the wind. Raindrops plopped against the window, and ran in intricate rivulets down the outside. Accidentally she caught a glimpse of her own reflection in the glass: what she saw was crooked, bent, and looked much, much older than fifty-five. But Mildred couldn't deny that it was her own image she saw. Wherever the years had gone, she thought, they had gone much too fast. Much too fast. If there was any consolation, it was that at least her Chuck wasn't around to see what the years of back-breaking drudgery had done to her. That much was good, at least.

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She plodded into the cluttered storeroom, filled a bucket with hot, soapy water, and lugged both bucket and a mop back to the front. Then the ritual began: sweeping the heavy, sodden mophead over the floor, pausing to scrub hard at a particularly dirty spot, squeezing the grimy water from the mop, and repeating the act over and over. Her mind grew blank and deadened. She forgot her painful legs, the lashing of the rain, even the passage of time. Her existence shrank to the patch of wet floor below her and the swishing of the mop.

Some time later, after she had dumped three bucketfuls of brown, frothy water down the sink in the back room, George came in. She looked up after a largely unsuccessful attack upon a persistent stain, and saw him dump his duffel bag onto the redwood table and begin to transport his dirty clothes to a machine. For the very first time George had appeared at the laundromat before Ann. Mildred positively stared at him, and before she could turn away he glanced at her. Their eyes met.

"Careful, dear," Mildred said tentatively. "I've just mopped the floor, and it's slippery."

George ignored her and turned away immediately, almost as if he hadn't heard her. But Mildred did not mind the snub. She understood. George was such a shy, insecure boy. Poor dear! He probably realized that she knew what was going on in his mind, about him and Ann, and how much he wanted to meet her. Mildred could hardly wait for Ann to appear. Maybe tonight he would finally speak to her. Maybe tonight he would finally break the ice. And wouldn't that be just marvelous?

Ten minutes later Ann finally did come in, swinging through the back door with hamper in her hand. Mildred hoped she would drop some of her clothes by accident, so that George would have the excuse he so badly needed to introduce himself while he helped her pick them up. Mildred watched and waited, but Ann didn't drop any clothes. She walked past George, seemingly oblivious to him, and said hello to Mildred. As she went about her business Ann never noticed that George began to play his secret, private game of spying on her as she loaded the machine and measured out the detergent.

I wonder if she knows, Mildred nearly said aloud, hardly able to control her curiosity. Something rasping and uncertain, but still very much like a girlish giggle, sounded in her throat. If only there was something she could do to help George. But no, she realized; he was on his own, just as Chuck had been on that day, thirty-

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eight years ago now, when he had come up to Mildred and introduced himself and they had started to talk. She even remembered, after all these years, what their conversation had been about. They had talked about the upcoming church carnival, and whether late July rains would ruin it again just like the year before. She could picture the whole scene in her mind, like an old, yellowed, but still detailed photograph: She was standing with a large throng of family and friends in front of the church after services on a hot, bright summer Sunday; Chuck had hesitated, ever so long it seemed, before coming over to join them. Of course, Mildred had known for quite a while that he was interested in her, and perhaps might even ask to take her to the carnival. He did, shyly and clumsily. And she had accepted. Shyly. And clumsily.

But that was long, long ago. Things had changed so much since then, and she no longer understood the ways of young people. Certainly not how most of them dressed, or their complete lack of manners, or the way they spoke and conducted themselves. She didn't know how they went about meeting one another and dating nowadays.

Mildred glanced at Ann once more. Such a pretty girl, was Ann. She had removed her raincoat and scarf, and was dressed in high-necked wool sweater and matching slacks. Her light brown hair was gathered in a loose coil on top of her head. Her face, almost without makeup, was fresh and glowing. She sat reading a magazine, as did George. But where as Ann seemed actually interested in the printed page, George was obviously pretending, turning the pages mechanically. He was only using the magazine as cover, to spy behind. If only Ann would notice it, and give him the least bit of encouragement. But then, Mildred pondered as she turned to dump her last pail of water down the sink, maybe she had noticed. And perhaps she was even shyer than George, perhaps beneath her veneer of quiet independence and self confidence lurked someone timid and unsure of herself. It was certainly possible, she decided.

Whatever happened, Mildred knew she would simply have to wait. And she had to be extremely careful not to be too obvious about watching them. After all, she didn't want to make them uncomfortable, maybe even drive them away from the laundromat. That would be awful, just awful. It was practically the only thing she had to look forward to during the week, watching them and fantasizing about them. She almost panicked at the thought of their realizing they were being spied upon by a nosy old lady, and

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deciding to do their wash elsewhere. She'd never see them again, and never find out whether they got together or not.It was such a horrible thought!

She had to force herself not to glance at them, at least for the time being. Instead, she busied herself with cleaning the dirty faces of the washing machines. Of course they didn't deserve it; they were such ugly, nasty, spiteful things. Nonetheless, Mildred liked the place to look as nice and clean as possible, even if no one except her noticed or cared, and she always reserved Friday nights for the thankless chore. Only once in a while did she sneak a covert glance at Ann and George.

Mildred was halfway through cleaning the row of jumbo dryers when a new girl entered the laundromat with her wash. She was not nearly so pretty as Ann, nor so nicely dressed. Mildred hoped her presence wouldn't unnerve George too much—he was always distracted when new people arrived. Then she realized it didn't matter; Ann had finished folding her dried laundry and was already preparing to leave.

Mildred looked at George and felt a pang of sadness for him, as well as disappointment for herself. It was so obvious that he'd been dying to talk to her tonight. He'd probably made up his mind even before he came in, but his nerve had failed him as it always did. Once again, they would part strangers. And it was such a shame. Two people so obviously right for each other should be together. Mildred wished once again that there was something she could do or say to help him. She'd tell George that life was simply too short and too lonely not to be honest with himself, and with Ann. She'd tell him just to give it a try, and tell her right out how much he liked her.

She watched helplessly as he stuffed his wash carelessly into his duffel bag, still concealing from Ann the furtive glances he darted at her. In a moment they would both be gone, and Friday night would return to its earlier desolation. Except for the new girl, Donna—for that was the name with which she had christened her. Mildred smiled at her, and received a welcome grin and wave in return. Donna was really not so plain after all, she concluded. Actually she was quite pretty . . .

Meanwhile, Ann walked out the back door. Watching her go, Mildred could no longer control her urge to speak to George. So she turned in his direction.

But George, duffel bag on shoulder, had already reached the front entrance. Hand on door, he turned to study both Donna and

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her for a nervous instant, then rushed out.

Mildred simply could not contain herself. Hobbling over to the front window she looked out, and could barely see George's figure through the steamy, rainstreaked window. He reached his car and tossed his bag into the back seat. But then, instead of climbing behind the wheel, he turned and walked rapidly down the narrow alley between the 'mat and the closed grocery store to the back lot, where Ann's car was parked. Soon he disappeared. But Mildred could guess what George had on his mind. He was going to help Ann load her laundry, then strike up a conversation with her. It probably wouldn't be much, she thought. But at least it would break the ice, so that next Friday they could pick up where they left off.

If only she could see what was happening! She turned from the window, and nearly decided to go to the back door and take a look. Halfway through the 'mat, however, she stopped in her tracks. That wouldn't be a good thing to do at all, she decided. They'd certainly see her there, *spying* on them, which would ruin any chance they might have.

It was wonderful, Mildred thought to herself once more. For the first time that evening she had forgotten the pain in her legs. Maybe, just maybe, this would be the beginning of a wonderful romance. It might even lead to marriage. Who knows? My, but hadn't this turned out to be a most rewarding evening after all? Just think of it—George and Ann, together finally.

She approached Donna and watched the girl insert her coins into the machine and pour detergent over her clothes. Donna really was a *very* pretty girl, Mildred reflected. Pretty, but lonely. Otherwise, why would she be doing her laundry all by herself on a Friday night? Mildred knew what it was like to be lonely, and her heart went out to the girl. But then maybe someone, someone like George or her own sweet Chuck, would come into the laundromat one night, and something wonderful and joyous would happen to Donna. Just as it had to Mildred and, she was sure, to Ann.

For a brief second she thought she heard something, like an argumentative cat's high pitched and plaintive yowl. But the sudden rush of water tumbling into Donna's washing machine drowned out every other sound, and so she paid it no mind.

Still smiling, Mildred looked about the laundromat, inspecting her clean-up job. When she caught sight of the long row of silent washing machines, the grin dropped from her lips. Those mean, cruel, spiteful machines. Why were they laughing at her now?

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BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



STEPHEN GREENLEAF

Photo by Ann Greenleaf

According to *Ecclesiastes,* "there is nothing new under the sun." The older I get, the more incontestable that becomes. That's the bad news.

The good news is that there have always been—and, one can hope, there will always be—deviations on a theme that are so cleverly wrought, so ingeniously crafted or presented, that they become new, and fresh, and novel. The best news of all is that Stephen Greenleaf has proved himself able to personalize the hardboiled detective story and make it his own. I'm sure that's no news to the author, who has consistently received critical attention and whose four novels have been variously selected for several book clubs. It should be great news, though, to those of you who feel that rereading your old Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald novels is the only way to satisfy your longing for superior American, tough-guy detective tales.

I discovered Stephen Greenleaf with his newest book, *Fatal Obsession,* published last May by Dial Press ($14.95, 250 pp.). In this latest novel, John Marshall Tanner returns to Chaldea, a small rural town in the Midwest, at the request of his sister. Because Tanner is doing

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his snooping on his native ground—his investigation centers around the apparent suicide of his nephew Billy—and running into people, places, and pungent memories of his past, we learn a great deal about our hero. He's in his forties, loves Mozart, is an ex-lawyer turned practicing, licensed private investigator in the state of California. The culture shock he experiences, coming from San Francisco back to Chaldea, is real and very poignant. It will tug at the collective heartstrings of all of us who have tried to go home again as we watch Tanner face down his family, face up to the locals' suspicions about big-city exiles, and look in the face the ghosts that rise to haunt him as he returns to the neighborhood of his youth. It is a strong writer who can pull his readers along this path, teaching them something about themselves as he exposes, slowly but surely, the complex psyche of his protagonist. Greenleaf does this expertly, layering the murder plot and solution in such a way that one is almost unaware of the extra dimensions that have been added for his reading pleasure. For, above all, the John Marshall Tanner books are solid mysteries, filled with the crimes, clues, action, suspense, and sheer psychological horror that one expects from masters of the genre.

If this sounds like a good thing to you, then I suggest you do as I say, and not as I did. Begin at the beginning, with *Grave Error,* published in 1979 by Dial. That book introduces Tanner to his future fans with a very intriguing case: the young and beautiful wife of a renowned consumer activist hires the ex-lawyer to watch her husband, whom she fears is being blackmailed. Before long the case explodes in murder, when one of Tanner's oldest friends in Frisco—another investigator named Harry Spring—is killed and left in a ditch. His widow, a feisty woman named Ruth, takes over Harry's business eventually (and she shows up in a later novel). It is for Ruth, as well as Harry, that Tanner vows to find the murderer. When he discovers what Harry was working on when he died, and for whom old Harry was working, the waters become deeper. Harry's client, it seems, was the adopted daughter of Tanner's own client. Again, there are layers beneath layers, and long-unsuspected connections between the various characters in what at first seem to be the separate cases piled on Tanner's plate.

The same layering device is used to great effect in Greenleaf's second novel, *Death Bed.*

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The case opens when Tanner is hired by a dying mogul, a self-made corporate emperor, who wishes to see his estranged son before he leaves the world—and leaves his money to someone else. Tanner must plunge into porn parlors, sixties political history, and the mystery of a missing muckraker.

In 1982 Dial followed up with *State's Evidence,* an intriguing peek into the darker side of family relationships, teenage dreams, and the battle between small-town mobsters and the hungry prosecutors out to hang them. Ostensibly Tanner is hired by the D.A. to find a witness to a hit-and-run case that will come to trial in a matter of days. Before it's over, he has dipped into a disillusioned marriage, dodged an ancient sword wielded by a student of Zen and martial arts, and generally turned over a number of rocks that had been long undisturbed. The themes of family ties, sexual conquests, corruption, and fanaticism in all its forms, in additon to the more conventional themes of power and wealth—all of these recur in Greenleaf's books, eddying in murky pools of motives and minor characters, assuming very different and very surprising shapes in each book. There's no repetition of people or places or plots, but there's continuity, especially in the character of Tanner. He is a man whom one cannot help but admire, and consequently relate to. He makes very good company.

(The first three books are available in Ballantine paperbacks at $2.50 each.)

MYSTERY REVIEWS

Murder strikes Palmetto, Florida, in **The Hurricane Season** of 1952. But author Mickey Friedman's evocation of a sultry, endless summer could just as well be set in Anytown, U.S.A., so graphically has she portrayed the string of sweltering days and mosquito-infested nights that pass for summertime in a small American town. The savage murder of the town's most celebrated "loose" girl provides only temporary relief from the boredom, however, for the sheriff soon arrests an uptight divinity student. Only Lily Trulock—middle-aged, strong on common sense, accustomed to occupying her idle hours by minding everyone else's business and then keeping it all under her hat—feels compelled to dig further into the death. This first novel has it all: engaging characters, an authentic backdrop, a multi-level plot, and plenty of suspense, with

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a harrowing hurricane for good measure. (E.P. Dutton, $13.95, 195 pp.)

Stephen Dobyns is a poet as well as a novelist, and it shows in his writing in **Dancer with One Leg** (A Joan Kahn Book/E.P. Dutton, Inc., $13.95, 229 pp.). This is a serious novel about firefighting, with a Lieutenant Francis Lazard of the Boston Arson Squad at its center. Flashbacks of how Lazard himself was seriously injured in a fire eight years earlier are woven into the tale as the sympathetic Lazard seeks the truth about a recent warehouse fire that resulted in death.The characters are well-drawn,the mystery is compelling, and the firefighters' milieu is outstandingly moving.

For classic mysteries, one can always turn to Dover's handsome reprints of old tales. One such volume is Edgar Wallace's **The Murder Book of J.G. Reeder**, a collection of short tales featuring the mild-mannered Reeder, a maverick investigator in London's Treasury Department in the 1920's. Only 109 pages long, *The Murder Book* makes good bedtime reading. Another shorty but goodie is J. Meade Falkner's **The Lost Stradivarius**, a 93-page Gothic penned in 1896. This is the story of a young man's growing obsession with the life lived by his wife's long-dead,wicked ancestor—and the hero's subsequent descent into madness. At $3.50 and $3.00 respectively, you get a lot of period atmosphere and some imaginative plotting for your money.

Janwillem Van de Wetering was profiled in this column last year. Now there's a new mystery featuring the Amsterdam police team of Grijpstra and De Gier. **The Streetbird** gets its title from a vulture spotted at the scene of a crime in the Dutch city's ghetto. It's an unlikely clue, but its appearance is taken in stride by our unlikely pair of investigators; and the vision of the vulture portends the mystery that will shroud this execution of a well-known pimp. Old fans will be glad to hear that the gentlemanly and wise old commissaris goes undercover this time to aid his two men, while new fans will be treated to the author's special view of Amsterdam as the mystery unfolds. Anyone who likes the "Martin Beck" mysteries of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö should make a point of discovering Van de Wetering. (Putnam, $13.95, 286 pp.)

Actor George Kennedy seems to be a man of many parts. Witness his first mystery novel, **Murder on Location**, as entertaining as any movie in which the actor's ever starred. And perhaps they'll make a film of *Murder,* in which Kennedy appears—as himself—and which has cameo roles for such famous folks as Dean Martin, Ra-

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quel Welch, and more. But don't mistakenly think this is only a gimmick, for Kennedy has written a lively murder thriller that takes place on the movie set of a big-budget western being filmed in Mexico. He narrates the tale, which has him playing Watson to a tough New York City cop turned actor. There's a strong plot line, snappy pacing, and great insider's info on moviemaking. (Avon, $2.95, 207 pp.)

David Nemec's **Mad Blood** is a rollercoaster ride into the passionate pulses and secret chambers of dark hearts that have been denied love. This is a difficult book to describe because it's densely populated with believable people, and the single thread of violence—two brutal murders of young women who were roommates—is but the brightest thread in a tangled skein of corruption, in the broadest sense of the word. The hero is a young parole officer who sets out on a quest to learn the truth behind that twelve-year-old double murder, not guessing how dangerous the path will prove to be. There's more violence, suspense enough for three books, and a shocker of an ending—and I can't tell you more without spoiling the trip for you. Just read it. (The Dial Press, $15.95, 308 pp.)

Here's a clever puzzler, part of Walker's British Mystery paperback line ($2.95, 186 pp.). **Invisible Green** by John Sladek has all the elements of a classic detective tale: a natty amateur sleuth with the outlandish name of Thackeray Phin; the magical number seven, only one of the delicious red herrings in this stew; and an eccentric London club of mystery fans, reasonably named The Seven Unravellers. A bevy of clues, each apparently color-coded, build in violence until Phin has several "impossible" murders to solve. This one's guaranteed to leave fans of British mysteries "tickled pink."

Houghton Mifflin has published John C. Carr's **The Craft of Crime** ($15.95 cloth, $8.95 paperback, 349 pp.). Its subtitle is "Conversations with Crime Writers," and that aptly describes this book. What it doesn't tell you, however, is how much fun it is to read these conversations with some of the writers whose books you've been avidly enjoying all these years, such as Dick Francis, Emma Lathen, and Ed McBain. And if you've agreed with some of my selections of noteworthy authors of a series' character, then you'll especially enjoy the dialogues with Ruth Rendell, Jane Langton, Peter Lovesey, and Janwillem Van de Wetering, *all* of whom have had a column devoted to them in these very pages.

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CASES ON FILE

THE TSAR CALLED DMITRI

by Robert L. Plumb



Courtesy of the British Library Board

A remarkable event was taking place outside the wooden palisades that served as Moscow's outer defenses against the attacks of marauding Tartars and Cossacks. The corpse of Tsar Dmitri was being cremated before a small group of surly nobles and disbelieving commoners. The scene was in marked contrast to the one eleven months before when the man called Dmitri had been enthusiastically welcomed at those same barricades by thousands of cheering Muscovites as he made a triumphal entry into his capital. Now, on May 29, 1606, his ashes were loaded into a cannon deliberately aimed toward Poland, and with an explosive roar they were hurled back at the country where he had mysteriously appeared three short years before.

This grande finale in the true life story of Dmitri is the sort of thing from which great drama and opera are made. Indeed, the extraordinary life of the adventurer who insisted upon being addressed as Dmitri Ivanovich (son of Ivan) has fascinated Europe's foremost authors and composers for centuries. He became one of the leading figures in what many regard as the world's greatest opera, *Boris Godunov* by Modest Moussorgsky. Not to be outdone, Anton Dvořák made him the hero of his own operatic classic simply entitled *Dmitri*. He gained further immortality in the plays

Above, Dmitri, the mysterious young tsar

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and writings of such varied literary giants as Alexander Pushkin, Friedrich Schiller and Prosper Mérimée. Dmitri's life thus reads like fiction, but strangely enough, in spite of his literary and operatic renown, no one to this day knows the true identity of the man who masqueraded as Dmitri, tsar of all Russia.

This is all the more surprising since the final three years of his life are documented in such intimate detail by both Russian and non-Russian sources that we know as much about him as about any ruler of the period. We know his physical appearance from portraits, drawings, and written descriptions. His surviving correspondence informs us of his inner thoughts and goals; while his deeds are abundantly chronicled by those around him. When we come to the preceding two decades of his life, however, there is almost total darkness about the man whom historians have chosen to call the False or Pseudo-Dmitri.

The first dozen years of the seventeenth century in Russia are aptly known as the Time of Troubles. It was a chaotic period of civil war, foreign invasions, Cossack uprisings, Tartar raids, crop failures, prolonged famine, depopulation of districts, and economic stagnation culminating in the introduction of serfdom for the masses. At one point Russia's two major cities were captured by rival enemy forces, the Poles seizing Moscow and the Swedes holding Novgorod. In the midst of all this turmoil and distress, a young man appeared from nowhere, claiming to be the twenty-one-year-old Tsarevich Dmitri, youngest son of Ivan the Terrible by his seventh and last wife.

The real Dmitri had died under strange circumstances twelve years earlier, and the throne in Moscow was then being held by the unpopular Boris Godunov. The new Dmitri now demanded the crown for himself as the legitimate heir. From that moment until his death three years later, Dmitri's life resembled a brilliant comet, its origins unknown, hurtling through and illuminating the heavens for a brief but spectacular period of time before crashing to the earth in flames and ashes.

The incredible story of Dmitri begins in the summer of 1603 on the estate of a Polish nobleman, Prince Adam Vyshnevetsky, close to the border of southwestern Russia. A male valet in his early twenties disclosed to his master that he was really the Russian Tsarevich Dmitri. He declared that he had

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miraculously escaped death at the hands of Boris Godunov's henchmen in 1591 after his mother's family had discovered the plot against him and had substituted another nine-year-old boy, who became the murder victim. Dmitri said that he was then raised by an unidentified benefactor before entering a Russian Orthodox monastery where he was educated. He subsequently shed his monk's habit and out of concern for his personal safety made his way to Poland.

The youth named Dmitri must have been very convincing because the Polish lord soon informed one and all that he had as his houseguest the true heir to the Russian throne, the Grand Prince Dmitri. This announcement produced unanticipated consequences: Tsar Boris demanded that the impostor be handed over to him; King Sigismund III of Poland commanded that Dmitri be brought to him for interrogation; and small bands of Cossacks began assembling in Poland, pledging to Dmitri their support.

During the next months, with a Cossack escort, Dmitri proceeded slowly westward to the Polish capital of Krakow, stopping along the way at the estates of several leading noblemen. One of these was Pan George Mniszek, an influential but impoverished Polish senator. In return for his backing, Dmitri entered into a marriage contract with Mniszek's fifteen-year-old daughter Marina, which held out the promise of vast riches for both father and daughter should Dmitri become tsar. It also appears that Dmitri was mightily smitten with this young Polish femme fatale.

Eventually, in March, 1604, under the sponsorship of Pan George, Dmitri was received regally in Krakow, where he had an audience with the king and other state leaders. Among the latter were numerous Jesuit priests and officials of the Roman Catholic Church, who showed particular interest in Dmitri and his claim. In an obvious gesture to gain the endorsement of the pope for his undertaking, Dmitri secretly became a convert while in Krakow and received a papal dispensation from making public his acceptance of Catholicism. As eager as Dmitri was for the support of both Poland and the Latin Church, his strange new allies were also quick to recognize the vast potential benefits for themselves if they could gain a foothold inside that bastion of Orthodoxy known as Muscovy.

In only one year's time after emerging from the shadows as

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a totally unknown youth, Dmitri had gained sufficient recognition that, coupled with vague promises of aid, he was able to assemble a small band of about fifteen hundred armed Cossacks and Polish knights and lead them on a trek that ultimately took them from Krakow to Moscow. The only disquieting note, and it was quickly forgotten among all his early successes, was a botched assassination attempt against him by two Russians presumably sent to Poland by Boris Godunov. It was, however, a harbinger of things to come.

Dmitri's accomplishments during his second year were even more astounding. His meager force swelled with new recruits and additional detachments of Cossack cavalry as he marched across eastern Poland in the autumn of 1604. Soon after crossing the Russian frontier near Chernigov in November, he rode at the head of a powerful army of some forty thousand men; and amazingly the Russian people in every village greeted him with open arms as their rightful ruler.

Dmitri's fortunes received a temporary setback in early 1605 when his troops were defeated in battle by a vastly superior army sent by Tsar Boris. Beset with numerous desertions by his Polish and Cossack units, Dmitri was spending the spring regrouping his forces when word reached him in May of Boris Godunov's sudden death and the succession of the latter's sixteen-year-old son, Theodore, who lacked any base of support from either the nobility or masses. Dmitri promptly renewed his call for Moscow's surrender and resumed his march on the capital. All opposition melted away in his advance; Russian generals defected with their troops to Dmitri's side; Russian princes and boyars everywhere swore allegiance to him; and the peasants hailed him as their liberator. The final obstacle to Dmitri's success was removed when Boris Godunov's unfortunate wife and son were treacherously murdered inside the Kremlin.

On June 20, 1605, the leading nobility and clergy of Moscow assembled outside the capital's walls, and there they acknowledged Dmitri as both the son of Ivan the Terrible and their lawful tsar and opened the gates of their city to him and his supporters. How sincere these vows were is in question, but there seems little doubt that the warm and emotional reception that Dmitri was accorded by the townspeople was heartfelt enough. Three weeks later the unknown Dmitri sat on the white ivory throne of his

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alleged father, Ivan IV, and was crowned by the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church as tsar of all Russia.

The new tsar was unlike any recent ruler his nation had known. He was highly intelligent and a man of considerable ability. He was of medium stature, his face was clean shaven and his red hair was clipped close to his head in the style of the Poles. He wore the fashionable dress of Western Europe instead of the cumbersome, restrictive garb of the Muscovites. He delighted his subjects by riding unaccompanied on his stallion throughout the city's streets at any hour of day or night; and the citizens of Moscow became further enamored with their dashing young leader when one of his first acts was to bring back his supposed mother from the distant convent to which she had been banished after the real Dmitri's death. Upon her return, the former tsaritsa, now known as the nun Martha, was publicly showered with affection by her long lost son, who thereafter included her in court functions and reportedly visited her every day in her lavish quarters inside the Kremlin.

If Dmitri were popular with the common people, he was despised by the old nobility and boyars who had heretofore guided Russia's destiny. For the most part they were pushed into the background as the visionary Dmitri surrounded himself with Polish advisors and staff members who brought enlightenment from the West into the midst of a mostly illiterate, superstitious, and backward state still floundering in the Middle Ages. Clearly the same progressive ideas that made Dmitri beloved by the people also made him dangerous to the leading princes of the realm. Standing above all else in their minds, however, was the matter of Dmitri's true identity; the tsar to them was obviously an impostor with Polish leanings. Plots against his life were uncovered with regularity once he was enthroned, but with the cheers of the people ringing in his ears, Dmitri preferred to forgive and trust the treasonous courtiers around him.

Dmitri's eventual undoing was his wedding to the Polish lady Marina Mniszek. In November, 1605, the young couple were married by proxy in a Roman Catholic ceremony held in Krakow and personally attended by King Sigismund. Six months later the seventeen-year-old bride arrived in Moscow, accompanied by a huge entourage of two thousand celebrants; and on May 8, 1606,

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two glittering Byzantine-like rites took place inside the Kremlin's ornate palaces and churches: the coronation of Marina as Russia's new tsaritsa followed by an Orthodox service in which the patriarch united Dmitri and Marina in holy matrimony. A week and a half of celebrations and merrymaking then descended upon the capital.

In the midst of this gaiety, Dmitri's enemies carefully planned his demise. The presence of a non-Russian and non-Orthodox spouse on the throne adjoining his, coupled with the large Polish presence in Moscow, provided the plotters with the final nail they needed for Dmitri's coffin. Playing on the strong religious and nationalistic feelings of the Muscovite population, the scheming boyars under the leadership of the aged Prince Basil Shuisky incited a riot against the foreigners early on the morning of May 17, 1606. During the confusion—when more than fifteen hundred partying and sleeping Poles were slaughtered throughout the city—a group of armed nobles entered Dmitri's private quarters, overpowered his small German bodyguard and seized their struggling ruler. When he refused to reveal his real identity, they silenced him forever. Other traitors sought out his bride of less than two weeks and placed her under arrest together with her father and other Polish dignitaries who had escaped the massacre. Within forty-eight hours, Basil Shuisky was proclaimed by his fellow conspirators as Dmitri's successor. The battered body of the former tsar was placed on public display for several days before his charred ashes were blasted over the countryside to convince even the most skeptical of Russians that once and for all the son of Ivan the Terrible was dead.

Identification of the man who became Tsar Dmitri has baffled scholars and historians. There are few clues to his origin. Boris Godunov claimed that Dmitri was really the defrocked monk Gregory Otrepiev, better known as Grishka, who had turned to a life of drunkenness and debauchery and was wanted on criminal charges in Russia before fleeing to Poland. Although the Otrepievs were an old Muscovite family, Grishka himself is a shadowy figure; and he may well have been created by Tsar Boris after he learned from his spies of Dmitri's alleged background. Two separate emissaries sent by Tsar Boris to King Sigismund demanding Dmitri's extradition as Gregory Otrepiev ultimately discredited themselves by ac-

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knowledging that they did not know Dmitri's true identity. Boris Godunov seems to have shared these doubts, as did Basil Shuisky's ruffians at the time of Dmitri's murder. The wild, dissolute character attributed to Grishka also does not coincide with the known temperate and gentlemanly traits shown by Dmitri. If Grishka were the impostor Dmitri, why did no one from the Otrepiev family come forward as was customary to claim his body for proper burial when it lay in Red Square for days following the tsar's tragic death? The answer in all likelihood is that they did not do so because Dmitri was not an Otrepiev.

Could Dmitri actually have been Ivan the Terrible's son? After the real tsarevich's death in 1591, an investigating committee from the government painstakingly drafted a detailed account of the event which established that Dmitri, during an epileptic seizure, had accidentally killed himself with a knife he had been playing with. These impartial findings seem reasonable. The boy Dmitri is known to have suffered from severe attacks of epilepsy—yet the disease was never evident in the man called Dmitri. Further, the adult tsar was a redhead; the little prince was never reported to have had red hair. The child appears to have displayed cruel and sadistic tendencies; the grown man was kind and considerate. Once he gained the throne, Dmitri was most generous in rewarding his Polish sponsors, especially the Vyshnevetsky and Mniszek houses; strangely, however, there is no evidence of similar rewards or recognition for those alleged but unnamed Russian families who had protected and raised him from adolescence to manhood.

In the last analysis the one person who surely knew whether the tsar was genuine was the nun Martha, the real Dmitri's mother. Her only recorded comment on this subject came when she was shown the slain tsar's body and was asked if it was that of her son. Her enigmatic reply was: "Why didn't you ask me that whilst he was still alive? Now obviously he is no longer mine." These hardly seem the words of a grieving mother standing over the remains of her only son.

Dmitri thus remains Russia's unknown tsar. Whoever he was, he carried his secret with him into eternity. The great pretender in real life appears forever destined to anonymity in death, in literature, and in opera.

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THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

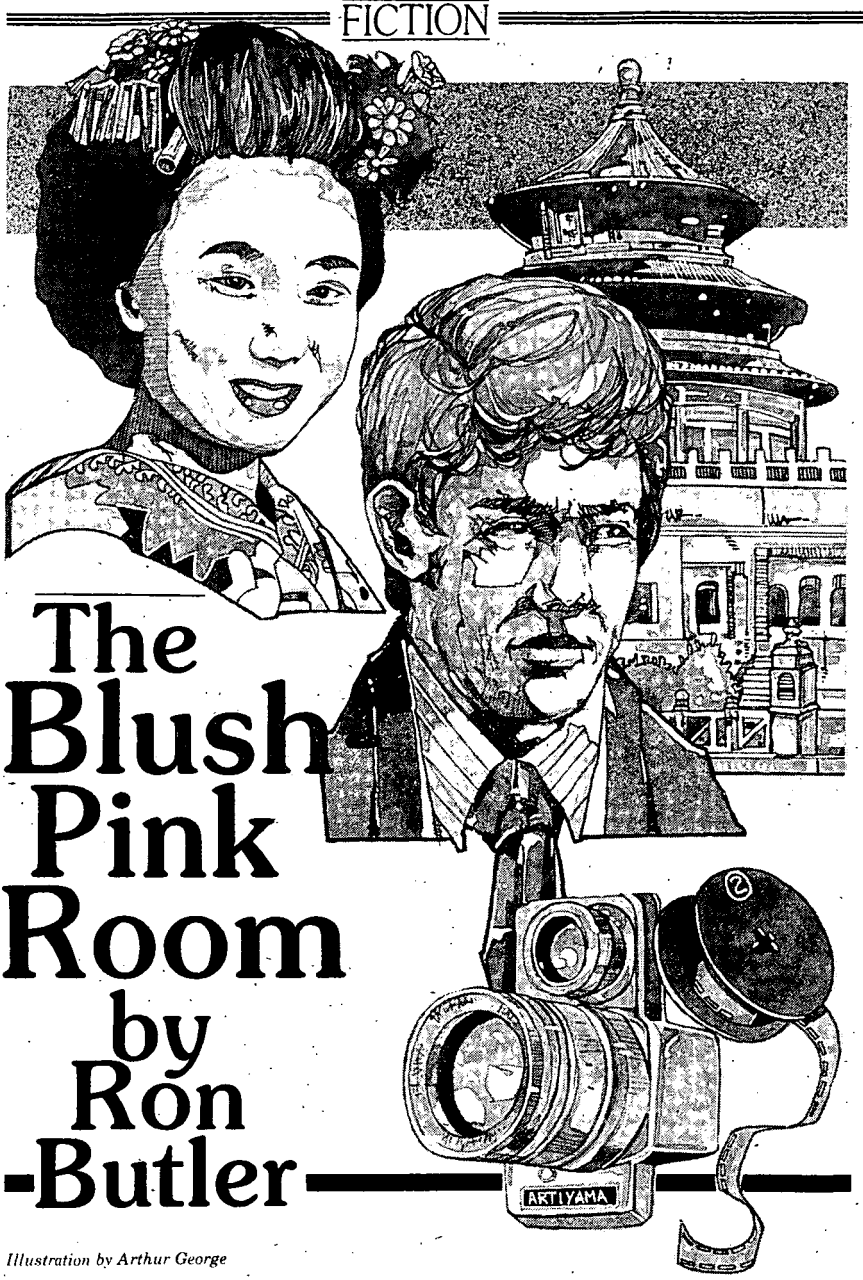


Arthur Tress

What secret message is to be overheard? And by whom? We will give a prize of $25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017.

The winning entry for the July Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

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The Blush Pink Room

by Ron Butler

Illustration by Arthur George

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The prawns on my plate were invitingly plump, cooked to delightful firmness in crisp, golden batter. Disdaining chopsticks, I hoisted one by its fantail and chomped down. Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki looked up from his own lunch and grinned as I groaned and pressed a hand to my cheek.

"You can delay no longer, Sam," he said with adamant finality.

I shifted the bite of prawn to the other side of my mouth. "My work . . ."

". . . is caught up for the day," the inspector intoned in high humor. "Goto-san told me as much when I stopped by your office to pick you up."

I brooded, hurt by this betrayal by my chief clerk. "The car . . ."

". . . was taken to the shop by Noriko after she dropped you off." Ueki's grin mushroomed into the smile of a hunter who has finally caught some long-sought prey. "The minor repairs should be completed by now."

Blast! Even my wife was conspiring with her father to have me dragged off to the torture chamber.

"Look," I tried feebly, "it's only a minor toothache. It'll go away."

"Only minor," Ueki repeated sarcastically. "For the last week, you have been unable to eat without pain, Noriko says you do not sleep well at night, and you offend the citizens of Okayama by going about in public with that unseemly swelling on your cheek."

I carefully placed a fingertip on the tender lump. "Yeah, well, maybe I should see a dentist soon. I hear they have all kinds of miracle medicines now."

"Hai," the inspector smiled, "and I will take you to one of the best practitioners of dentistry in Japan, Dr. Hakue Harada."

My mood, already severely depressed, plunged further when I forked over the equivalent of twelve dollars for my uneaten prawns and another eight for Ueki's broiled eel. As we got into his cruiser, I was sustained by the hope that some police emergency would announce itself over the radio, diverting the inspector from our destination.

"Shimpai nai," Ueki said, scattering my dreams of rescue. "Do not worry, Dr. Harada is a friend of mine and will look after you immediately."

With what I construed as a gleeful dollop of malice, Ueki hit the switches for lights and siren and gunned the motor.

"Mr. Sam Brent," the dentist said to the nurse at the desk as she filled out papers, then smiled

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at me again. "From Inspector Ueki here, I have heard much about you." The nurse returned my comprehensive health insurance card, and Dr. Harada turned to face the inspector. "Perhaps you should accompany us. I do not know how well our distinguished patient speaks Japanese."

"Well enough," Ueki said pleasantly, "to deny that he has a tooth urgently in need of attention."

"So," Dr. Harada chuckled, rubbing his hands together. That one word seemed to carry a world of implications about my character, all of which I resented.

Like a sheep to the slaughter, I followed the nurse to a room with four dental chairs, all but one occupied. Adjustments were made to accommodate my height, and, like dentists everywhere, Dr. Harada slipped into an expression of professional solicitude, probing gently and murmuring to himself as I tried to quiet my nerves by thinking of the recent profits in our computer hardware business.

Even that didn't help. All of the patients here shared the same space, and as Dr. Harada's assistants worked away, the high-pitched whine of drills and the sucking sounds of mouth-cramming instruments assailed me from both sides.

The rest was a merciful blur: the X-ray, the diagnosis pronounced with a solemnity that precluded protest, the helpless, trapped feeling of having a rubbery-smelling mask held over the face while gas was administered, and the nothingness that dropped like a guillotine on frantic thoughts.

My first awareness was of an insistent hand shaking my arm, then of Inspector Ueki's voice, equally insistent. "Sam! Can you hear me, Sam?"

"Huh? Yeah. Be okay in a sec." The white fluorescent lights were blinding when I got my eyes open and my stomach was performing acrobatics.

Ueki continued shaking my arm. "Please rouse yourself. It is important that I leave now."

"Hey, take it easy! I just lost a tooth!"

"That," said the inspector, "is a trifle for a strong, healthy man."

Trifle, he called it! Harada's nurse handed me a wad of gauze and instructed me to bite down on it. "What," I mumbled, "is more important than letting me recuperate?"

Ueki waited until we were seated in the cruiser before replying. "I've just checked in with headquarters and have been given a message to call Mayor Kawahara. Sam, it seems that someone is attempting to

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blackmail him."

"Mfff!"

"Precisely," Ueki said. "I wish to obtain the details from the mayor as soon as possible."

What I meant by "mfff" was that I felt light-headed and should have waited at the dentist's office until I was up to calling a cab. But then, I mused, the taxi fare, on top of taking Ueki to lunch, would have put me over my daily budget, and a free ride *was* a free ride. So true, the inner self added, and the pain is gone, too!

By the time we got to headquarters, I was well enough to think clearly, and to start worrying about the problems of a good friend.

Inspector Ueki's office was a drably functional room. Half of one wall was taken up by a chalkboard on which the days of the week were displayed in permanent characters; it was designed to serve as a weekly appointments calendar, but in all the times I had sat staring at it while Ueki attended to pending cases, I'd never seen anything written there. Next to the chalkboard was a cork bulletin board bearing departmental notices, and by this same wall near the door stood a small wash basin.

Along the opposing wall were a gray metal locker for coats and umbrellas, filing cabinets of the same color, tiered bookshelves, and, the only concession to the amenities, a coffee table centered between two sofas. Ueki's desk and swivel chair were positioned in front of a broad, dirty window that overlooked the blacktop parking area and, across a thoroughfare, the squat concrete buildings that contained the various office complexes for the prefecture.

It was in this cheerlessly utilitarian setting that we now sat as Mayor Yukuo Kawahara laid out the essentials of his plight. When the mayor concluded, Ueki put his ballpoint pen on his open notebook and stood up in front of his desk. "Mayor Kawahara, I have known your son since the day he was born. I do not believe there is a single atom of evil in Masumi."

There was a strong undercurrent of weariness in the mayor's voice. "One can be foolish without being evil, inspector."

Ueki picked up his notes. "The man who called you identified himself as Tsugio Yata, a managerial associate at an Okayama love hotel?"

"Hai."

"And this man claimed that your son took a young woman to the hotel. Furthermore, that the video recording equipment provided in the rooms for the playback amusement of the

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guests left an account of their actions and words?"

"Hai," the mayor said, face darkening.

"Moreover," Inspector Ueki continued, "you were told that the videotape would be returned for certain considerations, to be pledged to one Katsuo Ohashi, operator of the love hotel?"

The mayor again answered in the affirmative. "This Yata was brazen enough to warn me that the tape would be shown to some of the most prominent citizens of Okayama if I do not guarantee to use my influence in the leasing of certain city-owned properties, at ridiculously low prices, for putting up new hotels."

In a rotten way, that figured. Any land suitable for development in an overcrowded, mountainous nation carried an astronomical price.

"One other question, Kawahara-san," Ueki said. "Who is the woman who was alleged to be in the room with Masumi?"

I made as if to stand up. "If you'd rather I not hear this, Kawahara-san . . ."

The mayor clasped my arm, as an older man will to an esteemed younger friend. "No, no, Brent-san. I would identify her gladly if I only knew her name. You see, I . . . I do not yet know how to tell my son what has transpired, though I cannot believe that he would behave disgracefully, compounding stupidity by recording it."

The inspector began pacing in front of the window. "It would be best for me to speak with Masumi before I take any other steps. I will call him this evening and arrange an informal meeting. I do not want him to think he is suspected of anything wrong."

The mayor, face drawn in concern, seemed to move under a great burden as he came to his feet. "Both of you are friends, and I do not think I have to stress that I am worried more about my son's reputation than my own career. Please, Inspector Ueki, do what you can."

What, I thought as Kawahara's departing footsteps echoed down the corridor, did I know about his son, Masumi? Only that he was young, no more than twenty-five, and that he was a recent addition to a prestigious Okayama firm specializing in business law. In all Japan there were no more than twelve thousand attorneys following a tradition of written legalities established only slightly more than a century ago. To be a lawyer in Japan was, I felt, a special mark of distinction and, certainly, any personal scandal was bound to result in repercussions for Masumi and his father.

When I surfaced from my cog-

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itations, Inspector Ueki was putting on his jacket. "I can tell that you are troubled about the mayor and Masumi, Sam."

"Damned unfortunate," I admitted.

Ueki closed the Venetian blind. "The mayor's situation will not be too difficult to clear up, I think."

"Blackmail is a *situation?* Strange point of view for a policeman."

"No, not really, Sam. The mayor is not the kind of man to submit to blackmail, and, more to the point, Masumi is not the sort of son to open the door to extortion."

I forced my tongue away from the gap where a tooth used to be. "Then what the hell do you call the demand made on the mayor? A friendly suggestion from a couple of honest guys who want to expand their hotel business?"

Ueki pinched a cigarette from his pack. "A skilled blackmailer would have gone directly to Masumi for money instead of threatening a man with considerable influence and years of experience in the rough arena of politics. We are dealing, in my estimation, with persons of low intelligence, or whose judgment has been warped by excessive greed."

I got up and stretched. "So you think the land-grabbing scheme was hatched in misjudgment of how the mayor would respond?"

"Just so," the inspector grinned, "and I daresay this will be strictly routine—perhaps to the point of being boring."

"And you don't think Masumi got himself filmed with a gal of loose reputation?"

"Not Masumi, Sam. There is a mystery here, to be sure, but mysteries are only facts that remain undisclosed. Now, are you ready to go?"

"Sure. Where?"

"To your home, Sam."

"How come? I mean, you're always welcome, but won't Hanako have supper waiting?"

"Today," the inspector said as we walked to his car, "Noriko is preparing one of my favorite meals, and I have been so bold as to invite Hanako and myself. After we eat, I will see about meeting with Masumi Kawahara."

I made myself small and worked my way into the compact car, thinking, with a surge of cheer, that I could enjoy a hearty meal again now that that curse of the aching tooth had been lifted. Would it be spicy patties of chicken and fish served with tempura-style lotus roots, a gorgeous whole fish done in garlic and butter sauce, or maybe strips of paper-thin beef dished up with new potatoes, broccoli, and a green salad?

"What's she cooking?"

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"Spaghetti-meatbarru," he replied with a smile of anticipation as broad as his accent.

Ah, the mysterious foods of the Orient! I shook my head with a snort of amusement. "By the way, I presume 'love hotel' is some sort of cute euphemism?"

"Sam," Inspector Ueki said, blowing his horn at a lethargic trolley conductor, "it is difficult—no, almost *impossible*—for me to believe you have lived in Japan for so long without knowing about these institutions which, so I have heard, are *very* expensive."

"Enlighten me," I said with a touch of truculence.

"For *enlightenment*," he retorted, "you must find other sources. For *information*, I will try to provide the basics."

If he wanted a drink when we got home, he could fetch it himself.

My mind worked, my tongue moved, and, with some effort, I got out the one word that seemed to sum up my feelings best after Inspector Ueki's discussion of love hotels:

"Wow!"

Ueki, waiting for the left-turn signal of a traffic light, frowned. "That is an imprecise word. Are you saying that you approve, disapprove, or do not care?"

What to say? It was easy to see Japan as the homeland of fearless samurai, the gracious geisha, the exquisite tea ceremony, rigid Zen discipline, or hard-nosed business empiricism.

But a nation of romantics, dashing off to ardent rendezvous with poetry on their lips and longing in their eyes, planning and scheming, saving and hoping for moments of intimacy licit and otherwise in establishments where their brand of togetherness could be recorded and played back?

The statistics were staggering: of the so-called love hotels, there were more than twenty-six thousand at the last count, with Tokyo claiming three and a half thousand. At room rates reaching up to fifty bucks an hour, that added up to big, big business.

Care, approve, disapprove? Any of these choices would be a value judgment. I wanted to shrug, to smile, to frown, and, after hearing Inspector Ueki's vivid descriptions, maybe to laugh.

What did they look like, these palaces of passion? One might be built to resemble an ocean liner or Noah's Ark, another a fairy tale castle from Old Araby, suitable for a gossamer-veiled Scheherazade. Along the expressways, they were designed in the style of chateaux, while, near the provincial towns,

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they could be taken for run-of-the-mill motels.

"Well," I eventually commented, "I don't know as I care one way or the other, but how come I never came across one and how did someone get a videotape of Masumi with the safeguards you talked about?"

Ueki crammed another dead cigarette into the already overflowing ashtray. "Within the past few months, Sam, other police departments have reported instances of tapes being obtained through alteration of the mechanism that is supposed to erase automatically during playback. It has been done not for blackmail but to obtain 'blue movies' for the amusement of paying audiences. I do not know the technical details yet, but I am going to find out."

"Wow!" It was the best I could come up with—again.

"As for not noticing one of the love hotels before," Ueki went on, "it is my opinion that when you drive there is no surplus awareness for you to spare on scenery."

"No," I said loftily, "I think it's just that I'm not accustomed to looking for ludicrous things, so I sort of tune them out." So much for avoiding value judgments.

"When I was attending college in America," Ueki said righteously, "I did not laugh at 'professional' wrestling, roller derbies for women, or seed-spitting contests."

"Wait a damn minute now! There's no comparison!"

We were still at it when we arrived at my house. Noriko and Mrs. Ueki put drinks in our hands and waited to see which of us would smile first before withdrawing to the kitchen.

Masumi Kawahara was a gangling fellow whose stride outdistanced that of most men and who moved his arms and legs with the self-consciousness of a man surrounded by smaller people. When he was in the company of others, his broad-spanned hands shifted about constantly, as if ashamed of their unreasonable size, and the fabric of his clothing clung to the knobs of elbows and knees.

His face was that of a young Asian Gregory Peck, with the same lofty forehead, strong chin, and clear, wide-set eyes. A forelock of black hair seemed to be in perpetual downward motion over his brow despite repeated brushing thrusts of the hands, and the congregate impression was that of a man seeing and learning about the world for the first time.

"Oh . . . I see," were the words one expected from him at every turn of a conversation as he

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looked about with eyes of wonder.

Masumi Kawahara was, in short, an immensely likable person, and as we sat in a booth at a quiet club under a nimbus of soft light from stained-glass wall fixtures, I was absolutely convinced that he was incapable of indecency, of any thoughtless action toward another human being.

Being here at the club, where I often took business clients or friends for drinks, was Noriko's idea. It was, she said, the ideal setting in which Ueki and I could approach the matter of the blackmail threat as gently as possible, and there was nothing out of the ordinary in the late-evening invitation—my family, the Uekis, and the Kawaharas were close, often meeting socially.

Now that the conventional pleasantries were out of the way, Inspector Ueki began a cautious verbal circling. "Masumi, your father tells me you are doing well in the law firm."

"Ah," he said politely, apparently surprised that anyone would notice, much less praise, his progress.

"Yes," the inspector continued, "your father is justifiably proud of you, and I want you to know that I share that opinion. So does Sam, and so does Noriko."

Masumi's brow knitted in corrugations of perplexity. But why do you say this? his eyes seemed to ask.

Ueki glanced at me, toyed with his cigarette lighter, and tried another tack. "You would not, I know, do anything to bring shame or dishonor to your family."

There was no sound other than the hushed footfall of serving girls on the carpeting and the clink of glasses and ice on their trays.

The inspector lighted a cigarette. "Very well. The time has come for me to be blunt. Masumi, is it true that you took a young woman to a love hotel in Okayama?"

"Hai," he said blandly, as if the question and the admission it elicited were on a par with subjects like sports or the weather. But then, after a moment of consideration, he asked, "How did you know that, Inspector Ueki?" The expression remained guileless.

"I know about it," Ueki said, "because someone apparently has a videotape of you and the woman, and is making extortionate demands on your father."

"Ah!" Said sharply this time, with the anguish of a child who has learned of the death or injury of a pet. Then, more quietly: "I forgot about the video recording, Inspector Ueki. Yes, it must have been left intact, but . . . I do not understand how

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it could be used for blackmail. We did nothing that was undignified. Nothing at all."

Masumi, I realized, was oddly distracted, with something weighing heavily on his mind. I looked at Ueki. Like me, he appeared to be confused, without a ball of string to find a way out of this labyrinth. I barged in.

"Masumi, your whole family is tops with me, and I figure I'm going to be on your side no matter what's happened. So will Inspector Ueki, but before he can do anything officially to help straighten this out, he's going to need a lot more information."

The young attorney blinked. "I am sad but not ashamed," he said, then began to elaborate with a lawyer's care for detail, his hands becoming still as he pressed his fingers against the edge of the table.

He talked about long days devoted to the law, either working at the office or isolated in his room at his parents' home, poring over documents, reading cases, checking precedents.

And, he said, dreaming. He told us that the law, for him, was not merely a means of earning a living, but a commitment that recognized a human need to establish order in a chaotic world.

Masumi broke off when he noticed that our glasses were empty. "I fear I am talking too much and saying too little."

The inspector spoke for both of us. "I feel you are preparing us for what comes later, and, even if it were otherwise, I am interested. Please continue."

Yes, then. Masumi went on. This law was a passion, consuming and impelling. Yet there were times when, hollow-eyed with fatigue, back and shoulders aching from hours spent over books, his mind turned to another thought: marriage.

"Not a bad idea at all," I contributed. "I recommend it."

Ueki nodded. "Yes, Masumi, I understand. You are near that age when marriage is expected of you, and I assume your parents are dropping hints."

So they were, he said with the barest of smiles. And his answer to them was that he wanted to wait a while longer, working his way up to a better salary, then perhaps traveling to other countries to study their legal systems.

"Sounds reasonable to me." I believe in giving encouragement where it's needed.

"*Tabun,*" Masumi said. Maybe. "But, Brent-san, all those plans, all that excessive time spent with the law were contrivances, artificial and dishonest."

"How so?" Ueki wanted to know.

"For much of my life," Masumi replied, "I have seen my-

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self as ugly, a long, thin stick of a man poking above the heads of other people. I could not imagine asking any woman to spend her life craning her neck to see the face of the man she wed. So, I hid myself under a blanket of law books and fanciful dreams of travel abroad."

I was embarrassed, both because I thought Masumi was being too critical of his appearance and because I didn't know how to tell him so.

Then he dropped the shocker.

"All of that ended when I met Matsuko. She is the woman who went with me to the love hotel, Inspector Ueki and Brent-san, not for meaningless lust, but to die!"

When the mayor's son said he took a woman to a love hotel to die, no unlikely clap of indoor thunder struck me, time didn't freeze or accelerate, I didn't become suddenly aware of every sound and movement in the club, and no deep revelations about human nature came bolting out of the organic computer between my ears.

I just sat there, empty glass in hand, and wondered what the hell was going on. I leaned toward the inspector and put my perplexity into English. "Have you got any notion of what he's talking about?"

Masumi relaxed then and began to laugh with a sonority that made his shoulders shake. "Sorry, gentlemen, but I speak English, too, and will now conclude my 'case.' Does either of you know the Bar Figaro?"

We did. The bar was frequented by the younger set, serving food and drink that were excellent but not overpriced. From the entrance under a green canvas awning facing a narrow street in the Flower District, patrons stepped down into a room with a long bar and tables for four, passing, first, an upright piano of German make. It was operated by an older woman with the assistance of several barmaids and two white-aproned cooks in a kitchen to the left of the bar.

Figaro was one of the few places in Okayama where young women went, singly or in groups, for drinks or meals after work, some of them smoking, most of them at ease in a society where such activities among women were for so long prohibited or frowned upon. The inspector preferred more staid establishments, but accompanied me from time to time because the menu included the kind of pizza I like—topped with any number of indigestibles.

"If you are familiar with Bar Figaro," Masumi was saying in reverent tones, "you must know who Matsuko Shiba is—the one who makes people so happy just

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to be there when she is working."

Double wow! thought I. There was no way I could picture that young lady going to a love hotel with anyone. Not a place like that, and certainly not to die—no way!

Matsuko was neither plain nor beautiful as far as looks go, but . . .

. . . whenever she spoke, people smiled, and when *she* smiled, *they* laughed. Young men, meeting her on their first visits to the bar, often teased, sometimes suggested, and without a single harsh or unkind word, she let them know that she liked them, she liked everybody, but . . . no. Thank you, but no, and she said it so warmly and so sincerely that I never saw anyone puff up with offense or turn away in anger. Everyone, everywhere, I thought, knows a person like Matsuko, or should know one. Her face was indisputably Oriental, but Matsuko was universal. She was a Polynesian, a French girl carrying a milk pail, that kid with freckles in Wichita who inspired boys to stand on their hands and walk fences, but, despite being all of these, she was only one—herself.

Noriko, in common with other women, liked her, because Matsuko could captivate and charm without presenting a threat or challenge, and even crotchety old Yumiko, our live-in nanny who disapproved of almost everyone and everything that didn't date from the Taisho Era, warmed to the girl on the occasional evening outings when the Brent family ventured forth *en masse,* twins included.

"Know her?" I said to Masumi. "You bet, and she's a wonderful woman, a marvelous person, but . . ."

"Hai, wakarimashita," Masumi smiled. He understood perfectly what I was trying to convey with that "but." "A few minutes more, Brent-san and inspector, and you will be in a position to judge the facts for yourselves, to decide what can be done to help my father."

We polished off orders of bacon and eggs, got another round of drinks, and sat back while Masumi continued. "What happened once I met Matsuko was the miracle all men might hope for but never realize in an entire lifetime." Matsuko, the mayor's son said, apparently saw something in him that she had never seen in any other man. When he went to Bar Figaro with some of the young men in his law firm, she took special notice of him, managing to stand near, to have an extra laugh, a brighter smile, until, eventually, he was no longer interested in what his colleagues were saying about case dispositions.

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He asked, once his shyness began to melt, why she bothered to talk to someone so awkwardly tall and knobby-jointed as to make young children point and laugh when he walked down the street.

After Matsuko had listened to this complaint many times, Masumi told us proudly, she had asked: "Kawahara-san, what is the tallest, most beautiful object in all of Nippon?"

"Why," he stammered, "Mount Fuji, of course."

"Yes," she had smiled with all of the love of the universe in her eyes, "and you are Fuji-san to me, reaching so far above the common with the goodness and kindness of your soul." Masumi's voice trailed off.

"Yeah?" I asked, hardly aware that we were still sitting in the club. "Then what?"

Then, he resumed, it transpired that she became Matsuko instead of Miss Shiba, and he was Masumi, not Mr. Kawahara. He began to wait until she was finished with work for the night so they might stroll along the willow-lined river or go to one of the never-closing coffee houses.

Wherever they were, they dreamed together awake, sharing feelings about life and people and what might be and should be and could be until the time came when Masumi blurted out that he wanted to meet her parents because, well . . . she must know, but he said the words anyway and asked the question. But Matsuko lowered her head, crying, and made Masumi's heart feel as if an evil demon's strangling hands had gripped it.

Masumi swam in sorrowful recollection for a few seconds, then spoke again. "Matsuko told me that she did love me, but that I was the mayor's son, the member of an important family, and that her own father's past and his present humble circumstances made it impossible for her to consider marriage with me."

Ueki's body tensed. "Who is her father and what did Matsuko say of his past?"

"His name," Masumi stated, "is Kimpei Shiba. He is a widower who works as a carpenter, and Matsuko says he was once sentenced to serve a term in Okayama Prison."

"Ah, so," the inspector said in a drawn-out hissing. The words, like their counterparts in English, signify nothing—or everything. "May I assume, then, that you and Matsuko decided to resolve what seemed to be an unbearable situation with a suicide pact, that, for reasons not yet explained, you went to a love hotel with the intent of recording the deed, and that, for other reasons as yet unclear to me, you changed your minds?"

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"That is so," Masumi said. "As I told you, we did nothing that was shameful."

"I have never supposed you did," the inspector said, "but I have many more questions. However, we seem to be inconveniencing the people who work here."

Ueki was right; the hour was late and the club was empty except for us and the people racking chairs, running a vacuum over the carpet, and putting away glasses and dishes. But to postpone what we were learning, in my belief, would be a mistake: Masumi was being open with us, obviously reassured by our sympathetic interest.

Further, if I were honest with myself, I was more than a little curious to hear how Masumi and Matsuko found a way around the fate of so many who found themselves hopelessly snared by unfulfillable romantic love.

Some of them always chose to die each year, leaping from buildings, throwing themselves under trains, sometimes alone, sometimes together. I also wanted to know more about the video recordings—but, one thing at a time.

"Why," I suggested, "don't we continue this at my house? I'll call Noriko and she'll get in touch with Mrs. Ueki and the Kawaharas."

The bill was paid and a taxi summoned.

Our kitchen was my favorite room, comfortable and cheering in all seasons. The six wide sliding windows of frosted glass filled the kitchen with a diffused and mellow light when closed and, when open, allowed us to hear birdsong, the playing of wind in the garden trees and under the roof tiles, and the sandal-clopping passage of neighbors along the graveled lane. Against the west wall, like some rotund deity of happiness, sat the kerosene heater, its grilled smile suggesting eternal satisfaction. Its concave metal reflector magnified sound if one's head were turned at just the right angle, so that even a modest laugh could come booming back with startling effect.

Seated at the table now with Noriko, Masumi, and the inspector, cups of steaming coffee before us, I watched my wife work her magic, weaving a gentle, understanding spell that gave Masumi the confidence to take up his story again. Satan itself, I was convinced, could hold little back from Noriko: in *her* presence, it would pour out all the ignorance that gives it substance and purpose until it vanished.

There was nothing satanic about Masumi, however, and the remainder of his narrative

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was the essence of simplicity, uncomplicated but frightening because of what might have been.

"If we are to die together," Matsuko had asked, "why go to a love hotel? Would that not make a travesty of love's real meaning?"

Masumi had bowed his head in assent. "Yes, but perhaps it will show those we leave behind what a mockery it is to deny us the love we have for each other because of things that should not matter. For this reason, I want you to go with me, and also because it is one place where we can leave a record of our reasons and our sadness."

Matsuko had not resisted, but had looked away when Masumi registered for the room. She remained silent while Masumi turned on the video recorder and followed obediently when he sat on the bed in front of the indifferent, impersonal camera lens.

"Then what happened?" Noriko asked when the following pause showed no sign of ending.

"She got up," Masumi said, "after I read a *haiku* composed as a farewell and walked to the video screen, saying the poem was so lovely that she wanted to see and hear me reading it once more before we died, perhaps even *while* we died. I, of course, told her not to touch the replay button, because the instructions were that, once played, the tape would be erased automatically."

"Quite so," Inspector Ueki said, writing hastily in a notebook untouched until this moment. "If you wanted to leave a record, you would not be able to play the recording for yourself. At this time, I have to ask—what caused you and Matsuko to change your plans?"

Masumi's smile was that of someone who has discovered previously obscured aspects of self that, in the light of candid examination, lack wisdom. "We walked out onto the balcony, to the railing, and Matsuko drew back. I asked if the fear was too great, and she said, 'Yes, the fear of helping to destroy someone who is so splendid, so filled with promise—you!—is holding me back. Is there no other way, Masumi? You are an attorney, and does not the law teach that it is always best to seek reasonable solutions?' "

"Yeah, that's solid thinking!" I was a little excited after waiting for so long to see how this guy got himself out of what could have been the last big scrape of all.

Masumi smiled his appreciation of my enthusiasm. "When I looked down at the hard pavement beneath the balcony, I realized that suicide would be a denial of everything I believed in—the rationality of law and

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my love for Matsuko. I told her there must indeed be another way, and that we could give each other courage and support no matter what came to pass in life."

I got to my feet, clapped Masumi on the shoulder,and went to the stove for another cup of coffee. Whether it was the old-fashioned *harakiri*, the stomach-cutting of fanatical warrior types, or any of the modern methods of suicide, there simply didn't seem to be any pleasant way to leap into Charon's boat ahead of time without causing a lot of grief for others.

"Well," I said, returning to my chair, "I think I'm summing it up for everyone here when I say . . ."

Inspector Ueki cut me off without apology. "Masumi, did you or Matsuko happen to mention your families by name while the recorder was running?"

"Why, yes," the attorney answered, puzzled. "She said something to the effect that Mayor Kawahara was known to all for his kindness, and that her own father, Kimpei Shiba, was a good man despite his past errors, giving us reason to hope for her acceptance by my father and mother."

The inspector put the notebook away. "It stands to reason that, in the excitement of your discovery that living for each other was preferable to mutual death, you forgot to turn the equipment off during the whole of your conversation."

"That," Masumi said, "must be the way it was."

"The result of that oversight," said Ueki, "was that the tape and its soundtrack were left intact for the blackmailers to recover, either by accident or intent."

By golly, I'd forgotten all about the extortion angle, caught up in the suspense of the near-suicides. "Look, Toshihiko, nobody's got anything on them. They didn't . . . ah, I mean, nothing went on."

"To consider a problem like this with base thoughts," the inspector said mildly, "is to reach a false conclusion. The blackmail scheme is built on the expectation that the Kawahara family will pay to prevent having it known that their son is connected romantically with the daughter of an ex-convict."

"Hell's bells, Toshihiko, that kind of thinking is medieval!"

The inspector used one of the nasty grins he keeps in storage just for me. "Could it be, Sam, that nothing like this happens in America among the wealthy or politically influential?"

Sure, okay. I *could* envision headlines back home: "Senator So-and-So's Daughter Engaged to Mafia Leader's Son!" or "Banker's Son Elopes With Ar-

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sonist's Daughter!" Far-fetched? Nope. Guilt by association wasn't exactly a new wrinkle in the human trek toward reason.

"It could happen," I acknowledged casually. "So, what's next?"

The inspector tested the length of his accumulating beard with his fingers. "As soon as I get to headquarters, I will check into the backgrounds of Kimpei Shiba and the person who made the blackmail threat, Tsugio Yata. Shall I call you at your office?"

"You bet. Now, if no one minds, how about a little shuteye? Toshihiko and Masumi can use the upstairs guest room."

Noriko was making another pot of coffee. "Please look at your watch, Sam."

It was morning, six of the clock, and the twins began making loud demands for their bottles.

Inspector Ueki marched past my secretarial and clerical staff four hours later, paused to greet Goto-san briefly, and made for the sofa in front of my desk. "I have some information on Matsuko's father which may be of interest."

"Shoot."

Ueki yawned and stretched out on his back, feet dangling over the sofa's edge. "A few years ago, Kimpei Shiba was sent to Okayama Prison for illegal gambling. The term was light, and the prison records show that he received training for carpentry. The warden thought that Shiba was well on his way to rehabilitation."

"All right, that doesn't sound so bad. Anything on him since his release?"

"No. From our inquiries, it appears that Shiba-san is making an honest living. His neighbors speak highly of him."

"That helps—or should. What about this Yata?"

The inspector put a cigarette between his lips, caressed the tip with flame, and reached for the ashtray that used to be on the coffee table. *"Haizara wa . . . ?"* I informed him that it was no longer in my office, that I removed it to discourage filthy habits by some of my visitors.

"Yata," he said, flicking ashes on my carpet, "is a habitual offender, arrested and convicted a number of times mostly for pandering and — significantly —other efforts at extortion. He has spend a considerable amount of time in Abashiri Prison."

Aside from minimum security facilities like Okayama Prison, there are two places in Japan that should send shivers down the backs of any would-be criminals. One is Abashiri Prison, built on a desolate spot by the Sea of Okhotsk on the

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coast of the northernmost major islands of Hokkaido. It's only minutes away from Soviet air bases in Siberia and the islands seized by the Russians near the end of World War II. But windy, cold, and bleak as Abashiri might be, it was better than the highest rung on the ladder of punishment, the stone walls of Sendai Prison which enclose the gallows used for executions.

"Pandering and blackmail. Yata's a nasty character, Toshihiko. What's his tie-in with the owner of the love hotel—the person he told Mayor Kawahara to see about getting back the videotape?"

"Katsuo Ohashi," Ueki said, refreshing my memory. "We do not know the connection between the two yet, but my men have heard that Yata has an office at the hotel." He jabbed one of the numerous buttons on his digital watch. "I have ordered my men to the hotel with a search warrant and must be there when they arrive." He removed himself from the sofa. "I see no harm in having you come along, if you do not object to going to a place like that."

I grabbed my jacket. Naturally, I wasn't the kind of person to be curious about "a place like that," but maybe I could be useful, check out technical details of the video equipment, provide backup for the inspector if some crazed criminal attacked. Useful, not curious. Nothing shameful about that.

As the inspector and I stood in front of opening elevator doors, Goto-san called out, asking where I could be reached.

I pretended not to hear.

From Yubara, a famous spa in the Chugoku Mountains, the Asahi River runs approximately north to south, passing Tsuyama City before flowing placidly through Okayama toward its outlet on the Inland Sea. As Inspector Ueki drove along this broad waterway on the same prefecture road that, in the opposite direction, led to my home district, I was aware again, as we passed unfamiliar places, of how little city dwellers really know about their surroundings. So much to do, and so little time, I lamented to myself.

Then I grinned at my own brown study, a by-product, I assured myself, of fatigue. I refocused my tired eyes and took in the scenery along the road: a shop selling old-style charcoal sticks, a service station where two mechanics sat by a stack of tires, smoking and talking, an old woman bending down to pluck a cabbage from her garden, and . . .

"Holy cow, Toshihiko! What's that thing?" Unnecessarily, I

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pointed, then answered my own question. "That's the love hotel, right? The architect must've been pixilated when he drew the plans for that thing!"

Ueki smiled and yawned.

I yawned back. "What's the name of this monstrosity?"

"The Blue Mosque. It was copied, I believe, from a structure erected by Sultan Ahmet in Istanbul."

Whatever it derived from, it was different—a domed central building with four towering minarets, each encircled by a series of balconies leading from what I took to be individual rooms at the various floor levels.

"What do we do now?"

"Wait for my men to arrive," Ueki said, switching to a car-to-car radio frequency and checking the location and ETA of the other units.

We stopped alongside the paved road leading to the hotel and waited. The other cruisers showed up before a third of Ueki's latest cigarette was converted to ash.

Within minutes, uniformed men were pouring into the main entrance.

What do you say to a naked lady who suddenly looms up in front of you, or to a discus thrower who's not going to get into any modern stadium unless he puts something on?

Oops? Pardon me?

"Come on, Sam," the inspector said. "These are only statues, after all."

I started to laugh.

"Sam!"

I didn't apologize because it *was* funny, walking out of the bright sunshine of a Japanese day into a mosque-shaped love hotel housing in alabaster immortality Venus in all her variations, Apollo, Hermes, and satyrs, all posed under globes of roseate light held by terra cotta cherubs suspended from the ceiling by filigreed chains.

By the doors, in the center of the lobby, and looking out from wall niches were copies of Venus Callipyge, Venus Genetrix, Venus de Medici, Venus of Milo, and the Venus of Cnidus, all identified by letters in the Roman alphabet chiseled into their pedestals.

I visualized hotel guests stopping by the statues, consulting guidebooks, bending down to note carefully which Venus they were admiring—and broke into laughter again.

"Sam," Inspector Ueki admonished, "both of us are tired after a night without sleep, but we are mature individuals and we are here on police business. Please conduct yourself accordingly or wait outside."

I composed myself and fell into step at Ueki's side, girding

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myself in the sober restraints of maturity until my eyes reported to my brain: no gift stalls, no coffee shops, no newsstands.

Naturally, brain giggled, folks don't come here to to read or to look for souvenirs to take home to the kids.

Biting the lips and pinching the palms restored control just as we walked into the owner's office, and the silly mood dissipated.

Yata was nowhere in sight and Inspector Ueki gave orders for his men to determine if he was in the hotel. Katsuo Ohashi, for his part, denied everything with the air of an important man tolerating an interruption of urgent affairs.

"I am in the hotel business, Inspector Ueki, not an extortionist, and it appears to me that you have some grudge against my associate, Tsugio Yata, who has taken a day off. Whatever the man's minor mistakes of the past, he has been a paragon of efficiency here and, in fact, is quite indispensable."

"What the man is," Ueki said aloofly, "is a convicted felon with a sordid record of procuring and blackmail. Further, we have the statement of a man of unquestionable integrity that Yata has not abandoned his criminal inclinations and that you are an accomplice in his latest malefactions, this time including a scheme to acquire land for new hotel operations."

Ohashi buffed manicured nails on his tweed weskit. "Malicious hearsay, inspector. These are serious accusations, and I expect some semblance of proof before I allow this slanderous conversation to occupy any more of my time."

"The warrant, please," Ueki said to one of the officers in the room with us. He dropped the document on Ohashi's desk. "The search for proof is the reason for this official call."

There was a door to one side of Ohashi's desk, and with the warrant now legally served, Ueki yanked it open. It was crammed with equipment.

"Sam," the inspector asked, "would you please put your knowledge of electronics to use?"

Ohashi was on his feet, trying to block my path. Ueki pushed him out of the way.

"What we have here," I said after a few minutes, "are closed-circuit television monitors for the hotel rooms, plus the setup for making permanent tapes at the touch of a button. Looks like someone had enough sense to shut the system down when the police got here."

Ueki flashed a doomsday smile in Ohashi's direction. "Is there anything else?"

"Yep. This is a fairly sophisticated system. The monitors

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are cut in whenever a guest decides to make a 'private' video recording. And," I ran my fingers down a tangle of leads, "if the guests don't care for the video facilities, anyone in this room can still activate any of the cameras without their knowledge."

"You have no proof," Ohashi said. "This is only a security system installed to safeguard our visitors."

The inspector and I knew otherwise, but Ohashi seemed to have us. There were no incriminating tapes that we could see, no list of blackmail victims.

A policeman walked into the open office doorway at that frustrating moment and stood waiting at attention until the inspector asked what he wanted.

"We have located the other man, sir. Tsugio Yata. He is being detained until you can interrogate him."

"Where?"

A fractional smile flickered across the officer's face. "In Seventh Heaven Room, sir, at the top of the first minaret to the left of this office."

"Keep this individual in sight," Ueki commanded, brushing past Ohashi.

"All this and Seventh Heaven, too," I snickered.

Ueki frowned and stepped out into the lobby.

The minarets were seven stories high, with one circular room on each floor of the towers. In addition to the elevators, there were winding stairways which, Ueki said, met fire regulations and also provided an added measure of privacy for those who preferred not to meet anyone else on their journeys to the various "heavens."

"Toshihiko," I said as a panel over the elevator doors flashed the information that we were passing Third Heaven, "I get the feeling that Yata grabbed the evidence when he saw us coming. Think he tried to stash it in an unoccupied room?"

"That," Ueki agreed as we rose above Fifth Heaven, "is a distinct possibility. I assume that there was a considerable amount of embarrassing chaos when my men checked the rooms, but we will hope they located Yata in time to prevent him from getting rid of it."

Sixth Heaven was below us. "If we luck out, we may get the videotape of Masumi and Matsuko along with the rest of the stuff."

The elevator came to a smooth stop. "We shall see," Ueki said. "We shall see."

It most definitely was not the Guardian Angel of Heaven and Earth we encountered in Seventh Heaven Room, but a nervous, runty man in a spotted brown velour shirt,

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pleated trousers with a belt six inches too long, and room slippers that were frayed and torn. On top of that, Tsugio Yata's shirt sleeves, inexplicably, were dripping wet.

Further, it was not the brilliance of Divine Illumination that suffused the room, but a ubiquitous pale rose that was a shade above bubble gum-pink, from the thick crash towels by the bath to the carpet, the walls, the ceiling, and the coverings on the love seats. Purpose and function duly taken into account, I thought the color of Seventh Heaven Room might best be termed blush-pink.

The two cops keeping tabs on the unlikely Guardian grinned as we gaped and gawked at the interior. The bath was an unenclosed tile dais on which a crystal tub reposed on gilded columns, and a battery-powered model locomotive with blush-pink cab for two sat on a narrow track connecting the bathing facilities with the . . . aquatic boudoir?

This chamber of love—the blush-pink bedroom—was dominated by an enormous U-shaped aquarium whose center was spacious enough to embrace an oval bed. Through the curved glass walls of the aquarium we could make out small carp, loaches, something resembling angelfish, swaying plants, and snails. Before an aerator in the shape of a bubble-blowing Eros stood a large green Neptune's Palace with a figurine of the trident-wielding deity beside a doorway opening into a dark, watery interior.

"Oya . . . !" the inspector said.

"Well!" I echoed.

"Cupid's Wings," a sign by the blush-pink oval bed informed us.

"What . . . ?" we both commenced, and one of the officers, beaming, walked over and pointed to two toggle switches, one by the sign and the other protruding from a plastic insert in the side of the bed. Ueki pulled the switch, and the bed slowly rose with a gentle hiss on a hydraulic piston. Another flip of the lever and it sank back to us. With a choked-off chortle, I pictured the bed rising and falling with its passionate cargo, providing a full panorama of Neptune's domain.

We stepped across the train track and ambled over to a television set. Above it, on a long gooseneck extension, was a video camera, lens trained on the center of the aquarium-walled space.

"Cupid's Eye," a sign in *katakana* characters advised.

"My, my," Ueki said, addressing Yata for the first time. "What, might I ask, were you doing in this room all by yourself?"

Yata scuffed his slippers on

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the carpet. "Doing? I came to feed the fish. They are very expensive, you know."

"So," said Ueki. "Where is the fish food?"

Yata was having trouble paying attention to the inspector and keeping me—a redhaired apparition—within the range of his furtive glances. "Eh? Oh. I could not find the food."

Inspector Ueki went over to Yata and uptilted the little man's chin with a finger. "Yata, this visit to a love hotel has been most educational, but I have other work to do. Somewhere you have secreted the videotapes of guests chosen for blackmail. The tapes, Yata. I want the tapes and, of course, the record of victims you must have."

Yata's eyes fishtailed and jiggled in an ophthalmic St. Vitus' Dance as they darted from Ueki's face to mine and then, fleetingly, to a generalized area near the bed.

Ueki and I vectored in and crossed the tracks to the aquarium.

"Oh, Yata-san," Ueki said in a falsetto usually reserved for very young children, "come over here, please."

Yata cringed and trembled, but obeyed. "Eh?"

"Now we know why your sleeves are wet," I said in the same high register of voice.

"Indeed," Ueki carried it on. "I think, Yata-san, that you have put something naughty in Neptune's Palace."

"Eh?" Yata croaked several times.

"Neptune's Palace," the inspector iterated with relish. "It is large enough to hold videotape cartridges, and the appearance of your sleeves lends credence to the probability."

With Yata in reluctant tow, we circled the aquarium. The walls were too high for access without a stepladder, but on the carpet we found a long-handled mesh scoop—long enough for a short man to use effectively from the top of the tank if he didn't mind a little water up to the elbows.

"Great!" I said. "But, without a ladder . . . ?"

"Relatively simple," said the inspector, fixing his eyes on the upsy-downsy oval bed. He grabbed a generous portion of brown velour. "Shall we all get into bed together, Yata?"

"Please, please," Ueki's captive whined, shrinking from what I intended as an evil grin.

The inspector gave Yata a vigorous assist by the seat of his pleated pants and reached for the switch. "Shall we test this device, Sam?"

"The chance of a lifetime," I replied.

With the cops laughing uncontrollably, we began our excursion upward. What I

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remember, aside from worrying that lack of sleep was getting to me, was the comical stares of walleyed fish, gurgling bloops, and, on the ceiling, spangles of dancing light reflected from the rippling surface of Neptune's realm.

When we were high enough, Ueki cut the power.

"We forgot the scoop," I announced.

"So we did," Ueki said. "Therefore, I will dip Mr. Yata into the water and he will remove the contents of Neptune's Palace for us."

Yata mewled an objection, then sucked in a desperate breath as Ueki lowered him by the heels.

On the first dunk, Yata came up empty-handed, sputtering and choking. The third time, his hands clutched a knotted plastic bag containing several cartridges, which he dropped on the blush-pink coverlet with a wet gasp.

"Okay, Toshihiko," I said once we were on the carpet again, "that's it. What say we cut out and get some sleep?"

"A few moments more, Sam." The inspector leaned over Yata, who was slumped against the aquarium. "You must have written records, but, unlike magnetic tape, I do not think you would risk putting them in water, even sealed in plastic. However, if I do not find them in this room within two minutes, it is back into the depths for you, and you will remain submerged until I have results."

"The train," Yata said in a scratchy voice. "The names are in the compartment for the battery."

I was too weary by now to care much about the wrap-up, although it didn't take long. Ohashi maintained that the idea for extortion originated with Yata, and Yata confessed that it was, in fact, his inspiration, but that Ohashi's increasing loss of revenues caused by the recession had prompted the latter to agree.

At first, they merely altered the video recording equipment in the rooms so that the tapes were not erased during playback, selecting the choicest for sale to dealers of blue movies. Then, emboldened by the easy profits, they branched out into wholesale blackmail, setting up monitoring and taping units in the room by Ohashi's office. With the new facilities, it was possible to pick the most likely victims without having to spend hours reviewing the videotapes, even collaring some of the people before they left the hotel. The easiest marks were the professional and business types who checked in with someone else's mate.

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Masumi and Matsuko? As soon as Ohashi and Yata learned from the conversation that one was the mayor's son and the other a former convict's daughter, the scheme to acquire extra land at minimal cost began to take shape. The mayor, after all, was a politician, and could anyone doubt that a man whose livelihood depended on the image of respectability would use a little influence to prevent a scandal? Influence would cost him nothing. So minor a request, actually.

Were you not alarmed, Ueki had asked the two, when it became obvious that Masumi and Matsuko were here for death, not carnal indulgence? Yes, they had answered. A double suicide would have given the hotel a bad name, driven business away.

After Yata and Ohashi were led off in handcuffs, Ueki and I took a quick look at the Sixth Heaven Room where Masumi took Matsuko. It featured a regular canopy bed and a two-person toboggan from bed to bath instead of a scaled-down locomotive. It would have been amusing were it not for the thought of the balcony where two decent people stood, only moments away from eternity.

We were on our way out through the statue-filled lobby when Ueki stopped, turning slowly in search of something.

"What?"

"Ashtray," he complained, holding out a cigarette butt. "Why is it that I seem to have so much trouble finding ashtrays? First your office, now this."

I bowed to a leering stone satyr in front of us. "Stick it in his ear, Toshihiko."

He did, and we left.

Mayor Kawahara's eyes filled as the videotape on the borrowed equipment came to an end. "They love each other so much," he sighed, "and this Matsuko is a rare, wonderful woman. How could they have doubted that my wife and I would accept her as our own daughter?"

"Well," I said, turning off the unit, "Kimpei Shiba *did* serve time for gambling."

"The only thing I care to know about Shiba-san," the mayor said, "is that he is father to the woman who dissuaded my son from suicide. Ah, if only I could see this Matsuko now."

"Easily done," Inspector Ueki said with a grin. "Noriko has invited her to the house with her father." He walked to the window in the upstairs room and looked out. "They are walking up the lane now."

The mayor got up from his floor cushion briskly. "Good. Very good. Let us rejoin Ma-

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sumi and Mrs.Kawahara downstairs and greet Shiba-san and Matsuko properly."

Toward the end of that evening, it required little imagination for me to see two old men sitting in the warming sun as they played *go,* boasting between moves in their game of Japanese chess of children and grandchildren. Perhaps, reaching for a jar of spiced sake, they would recount the days when one of them was mayor, the other a hard-working carpenter who had conquered a craving for gambling.

That Masumi and Matsuko were to be wed was beyond question. The girl who made people laugh with delight when she smiled was already discussing wedding gowns with Noriko and the mayor's wife, and, if there was a note of sadness, it was that Matsuko's mother had not lived long enough to share in this joy.

Inspector Ueki remained after the others departed, helping us clean up from the impromptu party, then sat down with us at the kitchen table for a last cup of coffee.

"You know," he said, "it required courage for two people so much in love to make their decision to live, to face all the resistance and disapproval they expected fate to place in their way."

"Oh, yes, Father," Noriko smiled. "I am so happy for everyone." She linked her arm through mine and squeezed. "I am also happy that you finally took care of that tooth, Sam. You said it didn't hurt, but I didn't believe you."

"How'd you find out it was pulled?" I hadn't gotten around to telling her.

"The dentist called and asked if you needed anything for pain. I would have mentioned it earlier, but you and Father have been so busy."

"It was nothing," I lied, then risked a look at Ueki, prepared to wither in a searing flash of truth.

"Noriko," he said deadpan, "I can tell you that your husband comported himself with laudable bravery in the face of personal pain. And," he added, reaching for his coat, "I will also tell you that Sam was the epitome of dignity in extremely indecorous surroundings."

Friendship! I thought, letting my breath out in a whoosh of relief. Is there anything better?

With a wink and a fond smile, Toshihiko Ueki stood up and said good night.

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The Barracudas

by Judith O'Neill

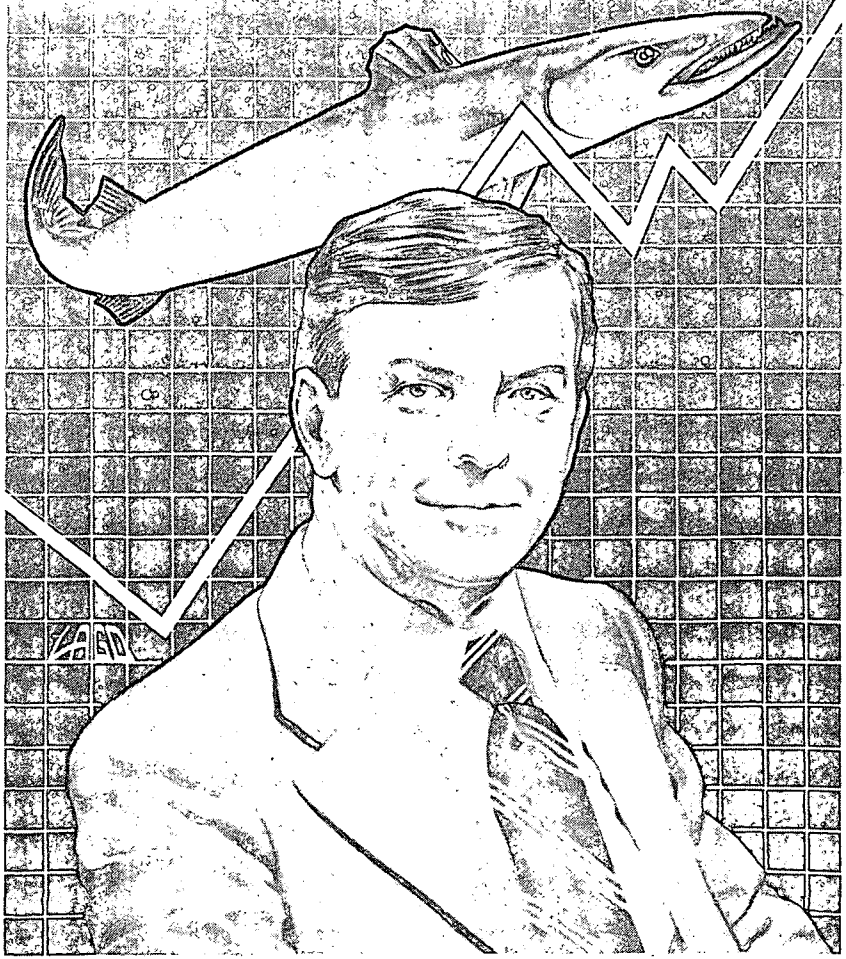


Illustration by Ray Lago

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When we first started talking about it, it was just a joke. Because that's the only way four adults can discuss murder. There we were at lunch, whenever we could get away from Tyrant and Little Tyrant, crying over our pizza and the latest atrocity and thinking up ways to frag our boss. None of us had any experience in war whatsoever, but we were coming to have a real heartfelt interest in fragging.

With the advent of our new manager, Reed Grayson, our office had become so like a combat zone that we all carried around the same stunned look you see on people on TV who have just witnessed total devastation. I guess if you were being kind, and somewhat stupid, you could say he managed by intimidation. At first I thought he intended to get rid of all of us and get his own people in, but he looked quite startled when anyone threatened to quit so I think he viewed us as his own personal serfs—we came with the feudal landgrant. And this company is still in the Middle Ages as far as turf goes. We are a computerized cash register company. We sell small computerized cash registers, then have to teach the customers to use them. Each office tends to be a kingdom of its own, and as long as sales remain high, Upper Management lets it alone, no matter how the serfs weep and wail.

All in all, Reed was a pretty terrible guy on his own, but he came with Little Tyrant attached to him and that made him a double menace. Little Tyrant was really a lady named Tamsey Hurd. Or person I should say. Tamsey was the eyes and ears of Reed, and when she couldn't find something bad to say about someone, she made it up. He encouraged this, of course—her listening in on our calls, checking our comings and goings. We used to say Reed could save a salary by getting rid of Tamsey and buying a time clock. I'm telling you, this was his idea of managing an office. He called it "keeping everyone on their toes," but it was more like keeping everyone at each other's throats.

Almost any other time in our lives we would have told Tyrant and Little Tyrant where to go and gone out ourselves and found other jobs. But that particular summer, we all four found ourselves in very sticky personal situations which, if not altogether precluding a move, made it a chancy and painful project.

Jamie Miller was new and scared. Her husband of fifteen years had left her six months ago with four kids to support. She hadn't held a full time job

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in all those fifteen years. She had taken the job of Customer Trainer in January as an entry level position in the business world. She was deep into grocery bills, nursery school bills, pediatrics bills, therapy bills, and terror. She walked around looking horrified most of the time.

I had a suddenly very sick husband and two kids of my own to feed.

Kevin, the salesman, was just out of college, supporting his wife through one more year of school and sending money to his mother back in Kansas. He couldn't make a move. Every penny was budgeted from payday to payday—for years.

Mel, our ad man and programmer, had come back after five months of recovering from a nervous breakdown. He couldn't fail. He was high strung and driving, and badly needed a success right now.

So there we all were—dumbfounded and feeling more and more helpless as the summer wore on and Reed Grayson fought his way to the top of the heap.

I have never been able to figure out just why he hated me so. From the first, he ridiculed me. My voice is highpitched, and he mimicked it. It's funny how foolish that makes you feel.

I had been with the company almost ten years and had great insurance coverage, which was what was helping us survive financially from my husband's heart attack. Reed actively resented my time with the company. During staff meetings if it occurred to me to compare something with something else in the past, he would say sarcastically, "Don't tell us how things were done twenty years ago, Sara Ellen. We need the now-view. You have to keep on your toes when you're swimming with barracudas." That was one of his favorite phrases. If somebody objected to a particularly underhanded ploy, he laughed and said, "You're in with the barracudas, now. You have to be brutal."

He loved to catch me in an error. He would shout, "See, Sara Ellen doesn't know everything, after all." He kept telling me, "You're just a secretary. Type, don't think." I had always known he felt that way, although my title was Administrative Assistant. I was going to school before my husband's heart attack. How Reed hated that! "Waste of time," he'd snort. "You'll be fifty before you're through." So what, I thought. I'll be fifty some day with or without a degree, and I'd just as soon have one at fifty as not have one at all. He liked pointing out to me how much I didn't know. There was no answering

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back. He called me "Psych-One Sara" when I tried.

Mel, Reed literally stole from. Before his nervous breakdown Mel had been great at planning and carrying through really successful sales campaigns for huge companies. He was brilliant if high strung and could come up with terrific off-the-wall schemes that made big bucks. He wrote them up and turned them in to Reed, who then presented them at board meetings and to his boss, the vice president, as his own. Mel knew, we all knew, but he wasn't sure enough of himself yet to do anything about it. He wanted to keep this job so badly and to do well.

Jamie, Reed sabotaged. To give you an idea—she attended an instructor class at the home office, came back and taught three straight weeks of stand-up instruction with not one guest instructor to relieve her for a minute, and went right into teaching another two week class Reed had scheduled her for. Class hours he arbitrarily changed from nine to five to eight thirty to five thirty, giving her no preparation time. During the second class Reed twice put new programming into the cash register memory, which significantly changed the system's performance. He didn't bother to tell Jamie either time, and left her looking like a real fool since she didn't know what the system would or wouldn't do from one day to another. She got horrible evaluations from the students at the end of the class and cried for two days.

He simply debased Kevin. Kevin was short. He was about five two, slim and dark, a very bright, efficient young man. Reed took delight in striding out when they walked together, forcing Kevin to trot at his side. He asked constant, rapid-fire questions so Kevin had to huff and puff as he answered. Reed treated him like a joke, smiling to himself coyly when Kevin offered an explanation or laughingly referring to his amazement that a wind-up toy could speak.

Reed exhorted us constantly to be tough. He even bragged to us how he was going straight to the top. First, of course, there was the VP to ride roughshod over, but Reed saw no real difficulty there, as he considered the VP inept anyway.

The VP had never appeared inept to me. A tall, impeccable man with clear gray eyes and a soft southern drawl, he had always seemed quietly competent. But Reed busied himself gathering documentation — keeping track of when the VP came and went, if he called in late or ill, checking on his stories, any customer who complained, any little slip the man

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made. Reed even spoke confidentially to customers, letting them know that any complaint at all against the VP would fall on *very* receptive ears. He took the VP's secretary out to lunch and pumped her for faults her boss might have been able to hide from the rest of us. He even had Tamsey onto the file clerks and receptionists up there, trying to keep track of the guy's phone calls.

Accidentally, of course, these were leaked to the president, as little slips of the tongue. "I would have asked the VP, sir, but he wasn't in that day." "I dealt with that Important Customer because he didn't wish to deal with the VP, after the last time . . ." "I hate to bother you about this, sir, but my boss isn't really up on this matter . . ."

"That's how you play," he told me one evening when I was working late and had overheard a particularly vicious report to the president's office up on the seventeenth floor. "If you want something, you go after it—just like a barracuda."

So we joked about methods of doing this guy in over pizza down in the lunch shop. Nobody knew anything about guns. Nobody had any talent with knives. Mel volunteered his tranquilizers but didn't know if they would really kill you. I offered to steal anything my husband had and we could mix and match, but we thought that might just make him sick. All of us were way out of our element.

And then my rent went up fifty dollars a month and my husband's care center increased its price twenty-five. Reed gave me an "unsatisfactory" on my yearly review because I failed to "communicate properly" with other personnel. (I forgot to genuflect to Tamsey from time to time, and that annoyed her.) No raise for me this year. I appealed to Personnel and was told the next available position would be in Seattle in six months and not to be a troublemaker.

Jamie was so shook she started bursting into tears in the middle of class. Kevin lost fifteen pounds he couldn't afford and developed dark circles under his eyes. Mel doubled up on his tranquilizers.

By the end of August we were exhausted, hysterical, and first in sales. Reed got a commendation and a big bonus. We spent our entire lunch hour that day arguing about the merits of a tack in the seat of his chair. Someone had heard it could cause spinal meningitis. And one Saturday evening in early September, walking to his car in the parking lot after dropping by the office to pick up some notes, Reed was shot. He was dead when the officer on nightly patrol found him.

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No one said anything when we got the news. At lunch we didn't look at each other, staring instead at the pizza, the cokes, the napkin holders, anywhere but into each other's eyes.

The investigation was short. An unidentified assailant was accused, motive—robbery.

After that nobody really wanted to eat together any more. Kevin started eating out on calls and not coming back to the office at noon. Mel got a promotion almost right away into corporate sales up on the ninth floor, and Jamie received a great offer to run the entire training department for a customer's firm and left in a hurry—for big money. In lieu of being stoned to death, Tamsey quit.

I was sent up to interview with the VP, as his secretary was retiring.

I had never been up to the sixteenth floor before, so I'd not seen the VP's office. One whole wall was window, the other three were covered in a gray suede. The carpet was a dark rich blue, and thick. It was awesome. The VP got up from behind his huge desk when I came in and moved around it to shake my hand and take my personnel file. I had met him often before and he had always been unfailingly polite, sober, with clear light eyes.

"Come in, Sara Ellen," he said in his quiet southern drawl, "and thank you. Won't you sit down for a few moments while I go through this."

He took my file from me and returned to sit behind his desk and leaf through my ten years of accumulated paper. I sat in one of the deep plush chairs in front of his desk and looked around the room. On the wall, opposite the window, stretched the largest fish I had ever seen. It took up the entire length of the low dark sofa beneath it.

It was a strange looking fish. I had seen swordfish mounted like that, but not this type. It was not flat, but sort of rounded. "Did you catch that?" I asked him when he finally looked up.

"Yes," he smiled, "I did." He looked at me gravely then, his solemn gray eyes as clear as the eye of the fish.

Before I even asked, I knew. I swallowed. "What kind of fish is that?"

He glanced over at the fish and then back at me. "A Great Barracuda," he said softly, "one of the very biggest."

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UNSOLVED

by C.R. Wylie, Jr.

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the December issue.

The little town of Plainview is exactly like hundreds of other inconspicuous country communities in every respect but one. Its scenery, its stores, its churches all have their counterparts at every crossroads in America, but as the home of the Murphy boys the town is unique. These remarkable boys, Bill and John, exhibit, for reasons as yet entirely unknown, a most peculiar aberration with respect to truth and falsehood. Bill is apparently incapable of telling the truth on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, although he invariably does so on the other days of the week. His brother similarly finds it impossible to avoid lying on Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday, although during the rest of the week it is equally impossible for him not to speak the truth.

When I heard of these unusual youngsters on my recent visit to Plainview I determined to meet them and observe for myself their peculiar behavior. Accordingly I called at their home and found the boys playing in the yard.

"Hello," I said, "what's your name?"

"I'm Bill," replied the older without hesitation.

"What day is it today?" I continued, feeling myself quite the experimental psychologist.

"Well yesterday was Sunday," said the older boy.

"And tomorrow is Friday," his brother added.

"Wait a minute," I said to the latter, "that doesn't sound right. Are you sure you're telling the truth?"

"I always tell the truth on Wednesdays," he replied.

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At that moment our conversation was interrupted by the boys' mother. After passing the time of day with her I turned to find the boys gone about their play, and I had no further words with them.

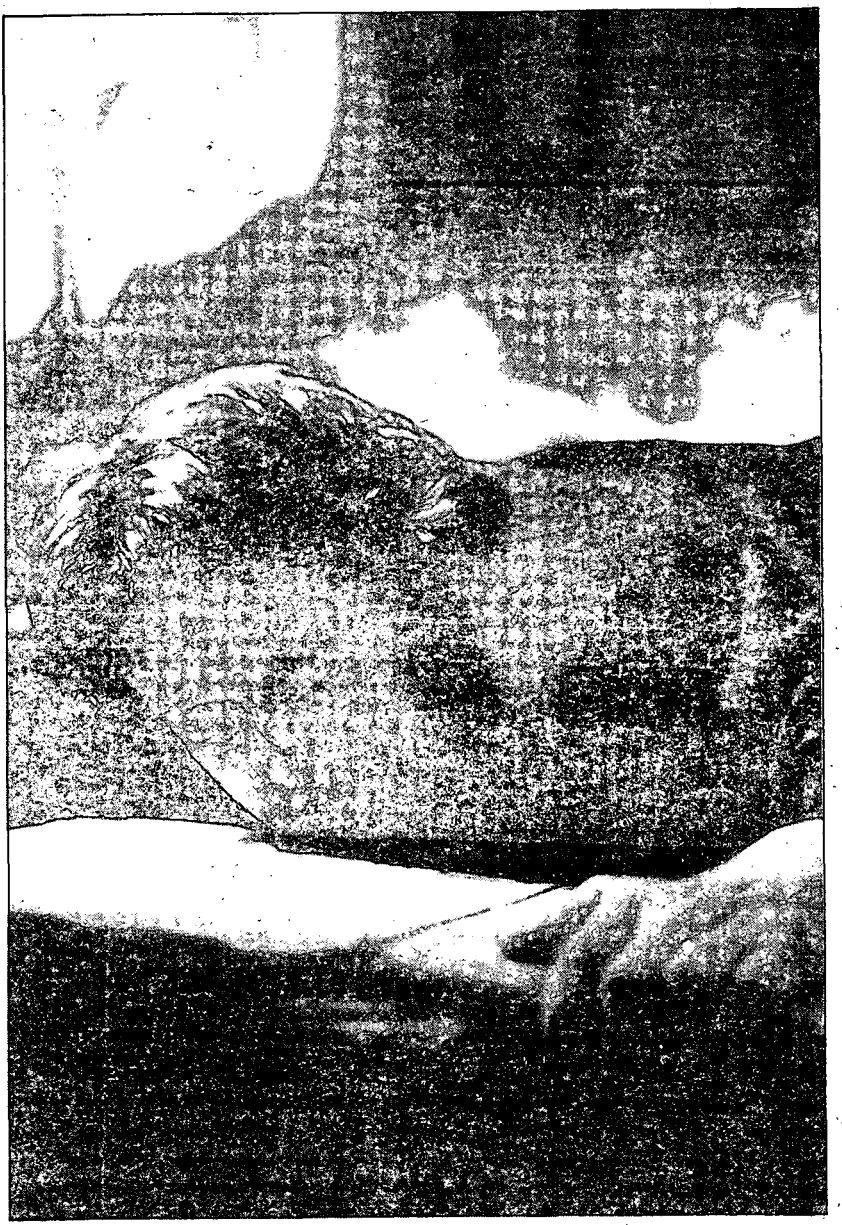
Now to me the most curious thing about the whole episode was that in spite of the dubious reliability of the boys' remarks it was possible, putting them all together, to infer from them with complete certainty the day of the week on which the encounter took place and also the correct name of the older and of the younger boy.

When did the meeting take place, and what was the name of each boy?

Taken from 101 Puzzles in Thought & Logic *by C. R. Wylie, Jr.*
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See page 137 for the solution to the October puzzle.

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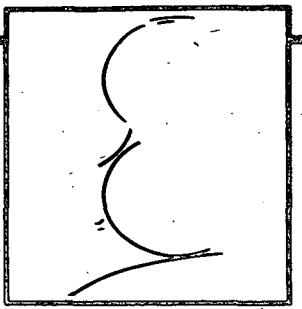
Michael Douglas clings to life while fleeing from two assailants in *The Star Chamber*.

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MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



For centuries until it was abolished, the unpopular English Court of the Star Chamber, working privately for the king, handed down judgments without benefit of juries. The movie **The Star Chamber,** set in San Francisco in 1983, concerns a group of judges organized by Hal Holbrook. They have decided to try and to execute secretly the violent criminals who are constantly being released by the regular court system on technicalities.

A young judge played by Michael Douglas has agonized over having to throw out cases after defense lawyers find minor procedural errors by the police. The audience gets a chance to scrutinize the police at work as they make their arrests; in every case it is virtually impossible to see any mistakes being made. Reasonable suspicion and "Mirandizing"—reading the accused his rights—are scrupulously observed, and yet each of the criminals somehow goes free. It comes as no surprise that Douglas, who has been forced to rule in their favor, joins the Star Chamber.

It does come as a surprise, though, that that doesn't work out either. To set things straight, Douglas has to plunge into the underworld on his own (with a little help from Yaphet Kotto, who plays a persistent San Francisco police detective). In the end police procedure comes off a lot better than court procedure. On the other hand, the Star Chamber solution proves itself just as beset with problems in dealing with criminals as are the handcuffed courts.

Looking at his legal tomes early in the movie, Douglas asks himself, "What happened to right and wrong? It's got to be in one of those books." The

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movie skillfully leaves this question hanging at the end.

Writing sometimes under his own name and sometimes under the name "William Irish," Cornell Woolrich produced mystery novels and stories notable for their gritty urban settings. His dark, seedy interiors and tough neighborhood street scenes proved to be ideal vehicles for movie adaptation, especially during the golden age of the mystery movie in the 1940's. The best known example of a Woolrich adaptation was the short novel made into Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), on which see more below. The current example, from a novel under "William Irish," is the French-language **I Married a Shadow.**

I Married a Shadow starts off in a promising way. A young woman in her final month of pregnancy is abandoned by her unpleasant, unsuccessful, common-law husband. Alone in the world, she boards a train and finds herself befriended by another pregnant woman and her husband. The train crashes, killing the couple, and the unconscious heroine is presumed by her rescuers to have been married to the dead man. His wealthy family, never having seen their daughter-in-law, make the same mistake. They take into their family both the abandoned young woman and the infant she has given birth to in the trauma of the crash.

The story turns on the eerie experience of adopting someone else's identity—and on the rising dangers of discovery. So far, so good. But most of the movie is taken up with establishing its intriguing premise, and very little with working out the results. Second, whereas in a Hitchcock adaptation the action would have gone from young love—between the heroine and the brother of the dead man—to its abrupt violation, *I Married a Shadow* develops into a romantic idyll in the French wine country, a setting that has a too calming effect on the action. So pleasant does everything grow that it comes as a positive relief to see a murder committed. *I Married a Shadow* demonstrates once again that the French are better at writing about American gangster and mystery movies than they are at imitating them.

As it happens, **Rear Window,** mentioned above, can be seen starting October 2nd. It is one of five Alfred Hitchcock movies being made available theatrically for the first time in twenty years. Those to follow are, in order of release: *Vertigo* (1958), *Rope* (1948), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1954), *The Trouble With Harry* (1955).

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FRAMES OF REFERENCE

by Peter Christian



As AHMM's readers are likely to know, the Edgar Allan Poe Awards of the Mystery Writers of America—statuettes in the likeness of the author who was the founder of the mystery story—are given annually in various categories for excellence in our genre. The **recent winners for television shows and films released last year** give us a good idea of the current state of the mystery.

The nominations for best theatrical feature were, to say the least, a varied lot. *Evil Under the Sun,* the third in the current Hercule Poirot screen adventures (in this film played by Peter Ustinov), was a brilliant adaptation by Anthony Shaffer of a rather old fashioned Agatha Christie puzzler, a neat seaside-holiday murder intricately disguised with a glittering cast of suspects. *48 Hrs.* teamed up convict Eddie Murphy and cop Nick Nolte in an amiable, swift-moving caper film. Meryl Streep starred as an icy, mysterious psychiatrist's patient who might possibly be a murderer in *Still of the Night,* Robert Benton's mist-shrouded romantic suspense film.

But the winner in this category was an import from Britain, a crime melodrama called *The Long Good Friday*—aptly titled, because most of the action takes place on an Easter weekend during which a high-powered London gangster suddenly, inexplicably finds his entire empire crumbling around him. The Kafka-esque mood is intense, and when we finally learn the reason for his fall, it is a surprise. Barrie Keeffe wrote the script.

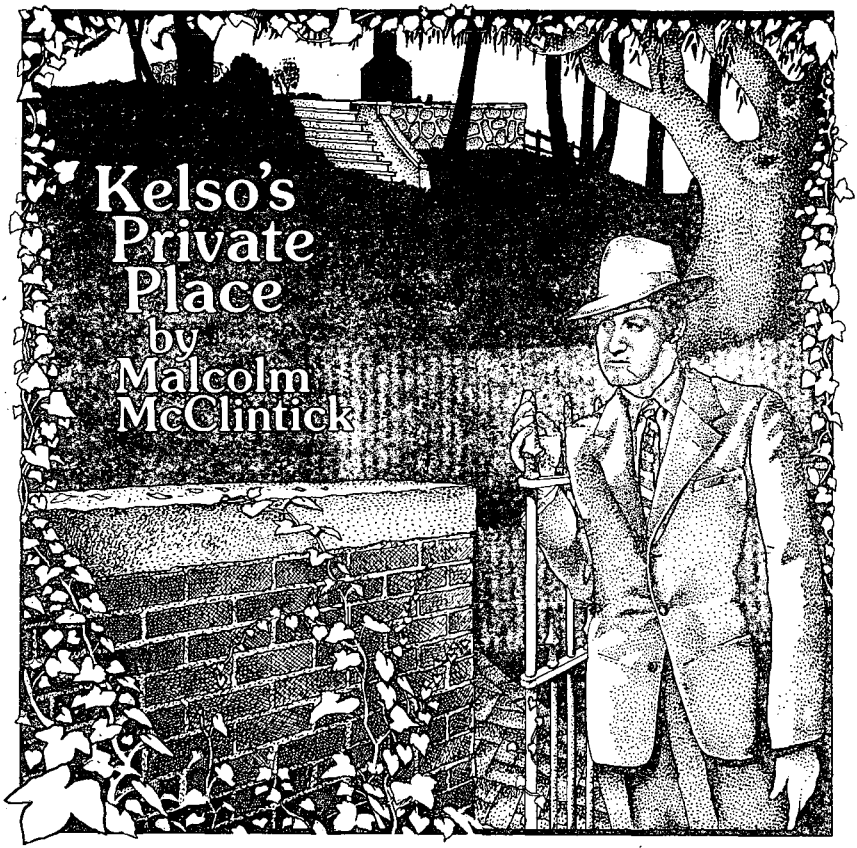
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The television series selections were a familiar group, culled from the few good new mystery shows on the tube. *Matt Houston* chronicles the dabbling in crime of a very rich playboy turned amateur detective, yet despite the flash the puzzles are often good. The premiere episode was nominated. "Ashes to Ashes, None Too Soon," a *Simon & Simon* story by Bob Shayne, was an example of the high-spirited excellence of that series about two private detective brothers; the plot was *very* tricky. But the Edgar went to a tale from *Remington Steele* ("In the Steele of the Night," by Joel Steiger), a light-hearted, slightly feminist series about the sophisticated woman president of a detective agency and the male who fronts for her. The winning episode dealt with murder at a gathering of private eyes.

There is a separate Edgar for made-for-television movies. Nominated in this category were two interesting telefeatures with private detective heroes. *The Big Easy* was set in New Orleans, syrupy-creole jazz underscoring all the action. *One Shoe Makes It Murder* had Robert Mitchum investigating; the show's intriguing title is an explanation of how one can tell that a body fallen from a parapet is neither accidental death nor suicide. Receiving the top prize, however, was a drama dealing with amateur sleuthing: Richard Levinson and William Link's *Rehearsal for Murder*. An actress has apparently taken her own life, but thespian Robert Preston thinks otherwise and sets up a staged replay of the events surrounding her death to catch the killer.

The *current* television year has contenders for the mystery award. A true-life crime is chillingly recounted in *Murder in Cayuga County*. In *Jane Doe,* Karen Valentine is an amnesiac—left for dead in a shallow grave but rescued—who struggles to regain her memory before the madman who assaulted her can complete his work. The new Mike Hammer telefeature, *Murder Me, Murder You,* was not written by Mickey Spillane and contains surprising ingredients (Mike's illegitimate daughter among them) yet is true to the Spillane spirit and is an extraordinarily good show—poignant and punchy by turns. And when *Walt Disney* can turn to a novel by Nicholas Blake *(Whisper in the Gloom* adapted in two parts as *The Kids Who Knew Too Much),* and Helen Hayes is scheduled to appear as Miss Marple *twice*—in *A Caribbean Mystery* and *Sparkling Cyanide,* both CBS movies-of-the-week—we know mystery television is flourishing and the next Edgar TV Awards judging committee will have a knotty time of it.

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Kelso's Private Place

by Malcolm McClintick

As a boy in school Kelso had often gone to the vacant lot on the corner, especially at night, to seek solace, solitude, a quiet place to think. Now, walking alongside its brick wall at nine P.M., he had an almost uncontrollable urge to revisit it, to return to the ruined foundation of an unknown house that stood on the lot, to reexperience his past. But he was on his way to see Susan Overstreet, and knew you could never exactly recapture the past, and had the feel-

Illustration by Glenn Wolff

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ing that by going into the lot and retracing his steps he might in some inexplicable way change forever his memory of what it had been like. Therefore, with all good intentions, Kelso started walking past the lot.

And that was when he heard the noise.

Had he not been a detective he might just have kept walking. After all, it was late, the noise could have been anything—an owl moving in the trees that crowded each other in the lot, a stray dog or cat rustling the high grass and weeds, even the wind rattling dead leaves—and most people wouldn't stop to investigate a random noise in the darkness of a deserted lot at nine o'clock at night. But he was a detective; he'd only recently been assigned to plainclothes; owls had never frequented these woods; the noise had been heavier than a dog or cat should make, heavier than blowing leaves.

So he decided to have a look. Just out of curiosity.

Holding his watch close to his eyes he read the time in the half light: 9:05. Susan Overstreet could wait a few more minutes. She was patient, as the girlfriend of a police detective had to be.

Kelso paused to listen but heard nothing. A car passed and he pretended to be lighting his pipe, which had gone out anyway. Then, certain no more cars were around to catch him in their headlights, he turned the corner into a narrow side street, out of the cone of illumination of the nearest street lamp, and found the old cast iron gate.

Now all was dark. He blinked, adjusting his eyes. The gate hung partly open; it might have been that way for a year, or someone might have opened it only minutes before. Carefully setting his crêpe-soled shoes down noiselessly on the cracked sidewalk, he stepped through the gate and onto dirt and leaves.

The lot was on a corner, surrounded by an old brick wall four feet high. Whoever owned it, it had remained vacant for as long as Kelso could remember. Inside, the ground sloped upward from all sides, rising through woods to a central clearing where once a house had stood. All that remained now was the chimney, crumbling and shapeless, and limestone slabs left over from the foundation. The basement was a pit now, filled with rocks and debris—a hazard to the unwary explorer without a light. The ruins were surrounded by tall oaks, maples, and poplars that had stood for years watching the house come, watching it go, surviving still, their trunks an odd assortment of black pillars

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to bump into in the dark, their leafy tops a solid canopy roofing all but the ruins of the house. And somewhere in all this, Kelso had heard a noise.

But now all was quiet, except for the wind sighing in the trees and the sound of his own breathing. He glanced around uneasily. Someone might be watching him from any of countless dark hiding places; someone might be lurking in any of countless shadows, or peering from behind any of countless tree trunks.

Then the noise came again, and this time Kelso was certain of two things: it had come from the foundation rocks at the top of the hill, and it was no animal.

Tensed, listening hard, he recognized the noise. It was the sound of metal dislodging earth and rocks, metal driven at the hands of a human. Up there in the darkness of the house's ruins, someone was digging.

For a second time the detective in Kelso came to the fore. At this juncture another individual might have turned and left hurriedly. The lot was eerie and full of shadows; the night sky was starry, but there was no moon and the usual glow of the city was shut out by the brick wall and towering trees. Anything could be up there in the rubble; anyone could be up there shoveling.

Taking a deep breath, Kelso advanced up the hill.

This is silly, he thought. Susan's waiting for me, I'll be late, she'll be mad. We were supposed to go to a movie. We'll miss the beginning. What'll I say? "I heard somebody shoveling in the old vacant lot . . ." He shrugged and kept going, planting his shoes carefully the way someone had taught him (in Boy Scouts?) so as not to snap twigs. A twig snapped under his left foot like a gunshot in the quietness; he froze, holding his breath, but nothing happened, so he moved forward again.

He was nearing the inner edge of the trees and now the hilltop was visible, a clearing with a large uneven rectangle of broken stones, not as dark as the woods, the battered chimney rising up uncertainly at the far end. Kelso looked around a thick-trunked oak, trying to see. The shoveling sound came clearly, loudly, from somewhere down in the pit that had been a basement. He forced himself out into the open, reached the edge, knelt down on one knee behind a square limestone slab, and peered over its top.

The basement was a clutter of rocks, dirt, shadows, and trash. Lots of trash. Did people really dump litter here? Near his foot lay empty beer bottles

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and cigarette butts. Dismayed, he shook his head, feeling that the sanctity of his private place had been violated.

In the pit the digging continued. He could hear the shovel crunch into raw earth, hear it scoop up dirt, hear the dirt fall onto a heap, hear the muffled grunts of the person who labored down there. Now his eyes caught the motion of a shadowy figure bending over a dark hole, the figure's shape indistinct, its features undefined. He stood up and stepped around the limestone slab for a closer view.

Just at that moment the figure in the pit looked around, and Kelso caught a glimpse of a high balding forehead, dark eyes, a thick mustache; without thinking, Kelso took one more step forward. His right foot struck a bottle. He froze. The bottle rolled over the edge and bounced down into the ruined basement, clattering loudly against earth and rock and smashing itself to bits at the bottom.

The digging figure ran. Before Kelso had time to curse himself under his breath, the figure was scrambling up the far side of the hole, gaining the top, and pounding noisily down the slope into the trees.

Kelso went after him.

The fleeing figure was a shadow flitting from one tree to another, a vague ghost in a vague netherworld. Kelso saw it reach the brick wall and go over; he was only seconds behind, trampling leaves and twigs, panting—he was going to have to diet some more. He'd have given anything for a flashlight. A tree limb slashed across his face, stinging his cheek. At the wall he jumped up, swung one leg over the top, and heard his pants rip. Swung the other leg over, cursing the human propensity for overeating, dropped to the sidewalk and stood puffing, staring up and down an empty street.

The night was as still as if nothing had happened. Instead of the echo of running footsteps, there was silence. He held his breath; the silence was complete except for the pounding of his pulse. He breathed again. Directly across the street a house stood completely dark, but two windows of the house next door were lit and Kelso saw a dark silhouette move across one of the yellowish windows once, then again. To his right lay the street corner. To his left the brick wall ran several feet before ending. The person who had been digging was gone.

He was stood for a while, estimating distances. He knew approximately how far he'd been behind the running figure—just about the distance from where he stood now to the dark house directly across from him. Un-

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less the fugitive had jumped behind a tree at the last minute or found some bushes to hide in, he must have made directly for that house, a two story grayish frame with black gaping windows. Had the man made for a farther house, Kelso would have heard running footsteps for a few more seconds after leaping the brick wall and reaching the sidewalk.

Feeling a coldness behind him, he reached back to touch his trousers. The seat was ripped open all along the seam. Sighing heavily, though not as heavily as Lieutenant Leill, he searched the area again with his eyes, but nothing moved. Whoever had been digging in the vacant lot must be in that somber house, maybe even watching him from behind one of those darkened windows.

Kelso had come to the neighborhood by bus because his VW was in the garage. If he left, the man might return. There was only one thing to do.

He walked along the brick wall to the iron gate and reentered the lot. Making his way slowly this time, he moved upward through the trees to the clearing, hesitated for a minute in the darkness at the edge of the ruined basement, then eased himself down into the deep rectangular pit of earth and stone and rubble. After poking around for a while, he found a place where dirt had recently been moved and replaced. He knelt; his hands felt an area of fresh raw dirt an inch lower than the surrounding ground, and next to it a mound of loose earth. The digger had almost finished his task before being interrupted by Kelso.

But the man hadn't had time to pack down the spot with his shovel; the dirt came out easily as Kelso scooped up handfuls of it. His pants were filthy, but he had other pants. Almost a foot down, his fingers touched a solid object. He uncovered it, lifted it out, then listened to make certain no one was coming. Around him was silence.

Kelso scrambled out of the pit and made his way through the woods again to the brick wall, this time coming out by the main street to avoid being observed from the house. This meant he had to climb the wall again, but since his pants were already ripped and stained it didn't matter. On the sidewalk finally, he hurried towards Susan's house three blocks away.

"You're late." Susan Overstreet held open her front door and gazed at Kelso. As he moved past her into the house her smile turned to a wide-eyed stare: "George—what in the world?"

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"I need sewing up," he said. "Sorry about all this dirt."

"I see you're wearing your polka-dotted shorts."

He felt his face go hot. "Can I use your phone?"

"Sure. If you don't mind washing your hands first. What's this?"

"A jewelry case, I think." He handed it to her and hurried to the bathroom.

When he came out, Susan had spread newspapers over the kitchen table and set the container on them. It was a leather case about a foot long, half as wide, and two inches deep. A small metal clasp held it shut, but there was no lock. Kelso used the blade of a paring knife to open the clasp and ease up the lid. They looked inside.

"Look at it!" Susan said.

"I'm looking."

The case was lined with very dark purple velvet. Lying on the velvet was a collection of bracelets, necklaces, and clasps, all tarnished metal studded with jewels in red, yellow, white, green, and blue.

"I don't know much about it," Kelso said, "but this stuff looks old. And valuable."

"Where'd it come from? Where'd you get it?"

He lit his pipe and told her.

"What if it's all perfectly innocent?" she asked when he'd finished. "What if somebody who lives in that house across the street just uses the lot as a kind of safe deposit box or something?"

Kelso nodded. "I get what you mean. Maybe no crime's been committed, and I've dug up somebody's personal property. But the man ran."

"Maybe he thought you wanted to steal it."

"Maybe. But I don't think so. I think he ran because he was guilty of something."

"You could be wrong, George."

He looked at her. Her wide brown eyes contrasted with her blonde hair. There were times when he acted too quickly, and she could slow him down. But this time he felt like trusting his instincts.

"I appreciate your concern," he told her. "But I'm going to check this out." He went to the wall phone and dialed a number. "This is Kelso. Is Diller there?" He waited. A voice came on the line. "Diller? This is George Kelso. Listen, can you tell me if you have a recent report on any missing or stolen jewelry? It'd be in a leather case, pretty old—okay, I'll hold."

After a minute the voice returned. "Kelso?"

"Yeah?"

"You're in luck. Some guy named Frederick Barbour called this morning at ten o'clock to report a burglary, apparently from the night before. Case was assigned to burglary detectives."

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You know how long that'll take. Let's see—only sign of entry was a rear window that had been left open. The jewels were his wife's, heavily insured. The usual report was filed. Nothing else. Why? You got something?"

"What's the address?"

Diller read off an address.

"Okay. Thanks a lot. I may have something. I'll call you back. You on the night shift, or just working late?"

"Night shift. Two weeks."

"Have fun," Kelso said, and hung up. He turned back to look at Susan, who was peering at the jewels. "They were reported stolen from Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Barbour this morning," he told her. "And guess where they live?"

Susan's dark eyes blinked. "Where?"

"In the house directly across the street from the vacant lot. The house I'm almost sure the man I chased ran into."

"So what now?"

Kelso looked down at his dirt-covered clothes. "Get something clean to wear, and then go watch that house till morning. If Barbour's trying to work an insurance swindle, he knows somebody saw him and chased him. He may try to leave. I guess I'll take a bus back to my apartment—"

"Why don't you just take those things off and I'll toss 'em in the washer?" she said. "They're washable, aren't they? I'll make some coffee and sandwiches while we wait. Then we can use my car. You'll need a partner."

"I was hoping you'd offer," he said.

Susan's Olds was more comfortable to sleep in than Kelso's VW bug, but not overly comfortable. An hour and a half later they parked it at the curb two doors down from the vacant lot. The small street was dark. Kelso lay down awkwardly in the back seat and eventually slept. At four A.M. Susan awakened him and they changed places. It was chilly and the sky was getting light. Birds started to sing. Kelso watched the trees change from black to olive green. Lights blinked on in houses. A young girl tossed newspapers from a squeaky bicycle. Susan woke up at six thirty and Kelso poured coffee from a thermos.

"Anything happen?" she asked sleepily.

"No. Nothing. Except my foot went to sleep."

The May sun glared into the side street. At eight o'clock the front door of the house directly across from the vacant lot opened and a woman of fifty or so, in housecoat and slippers, bent to pick up her morning paper. She glanced down the street towards the Olds, then stepped back and closed her

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door. Fifteen minutes later Kelso climbed stiffly out of the car.

"Listen, I'm going in there now," he said. "Maybe you should drive on home and wait for me there."

"You're trying to get rid of me. I'm waiting for you here."

Seeing her determined smile, he shrugged. "Suit yourself."

He crossed the street, walked past two houses to the grayish two story frame, stepped up onto a small cement porch, then paused to glance over his shoulder. Opposite, the vacant lot rose up to its hilltop, surrounded by its brick wall and thick woods. At the curb two houses down, Susan watched from her Olds. Birds chattered. Kelso turned and pressed the bell button.

In a minute the door opened and the fiftyish woman looked out at him, still in robe and slippers, her face cautious.

"Yes? May I help you?"

"Good morning, ma'am. Sorry to bother you so early. I'm Sergeant Kelso, from the Police Department." He showed her his badge and ID card. "Could I ask you a couple of questions?"

This was a crucial phase. If she said no, he was in trouble. But she opened the door wider.

"The police . . . are you here about my jewelry, by any chance?"

Kelso tried not to stare. His pulse speeded up. "Your jewelry, ma'am?"

"Yes, my jewelry, that was reported stolen. Please, come in." She stepped back to let him enter and he saw anxious green-gray eyes in a pale, well preserved face surrounded by soft grayish-brown hair. She had a little money, and had bothered to take care of herself. "Fred said he called up yesterday to report it," she continued. "It was terrible. We'd just come back from shopping and the door was unlocked. He made me stay in the car till he was sure nobody was still inside—no burglars, you know—and then we found a window open upstairs and my jewelry case was gone. Can you imagine? I've had them in my family for over seventy-five years, and I was going to leave them to my daughter, and now—*this.*" She'd closed the door, ushered him to an armchair in a dim, comfortable living room, and taken a chair opposite. "They were insured, of course. Heavily insured. But what's fifty thousand dollars compared to a family keepsake? Money can't buy sentiment, you know. Excuse me, I'm sorry. I'm Marjorie Barbour. There's fresh coffee, if you'd like some?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Barbour, that'd be nice. Two sugars, please."

She got up to fetch the coffee.

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Kelso took out his pipe but saw there were no ashtrays and pocketed it. A cigarette would've been nice, but he'd quit smoking them. Coffee would have to do. He looked around.

It was a nice house. Forty or fifty thousand dollars, he estimated. The insurance money could pay off the mortgage, pay many bills—if you were interested in cash and not sentiment.

He stood up when Marjorie Barbour returned, took the cup of steaming coffee she offered him, set it on a side table and sank heavily into his chair.

"You say your husband discovered the burglary, Mrs. Barbour?"

She nodded, stirring her coffee. "Yes, he was first to the door. He said, 'Get back in the car, Marjorie, the front door's open!' So I did. He's very commanding. And, really, if the burglar'd still been inside, it could have been dangerous, couldn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am." The coffee was too hot, he'd burned his tongue. "Uh, where'd you keep your jewelry box?"

"Well, that's the silly part, sergeant. I guess I'd had it around so long that I'd more or less begun to take it for granted, you know. Somewhere or other in my bedroom, but I didn't remember the exact spot."

"And Fred? Your husband? Is he here now?"

"Fred? Why, he's upstairs. Should be down any minute. He's such a sleepyhead, always second down on Saturday, but he works so hard five days a week. He's a salesman, you know. Shoes. It's a hard job, with ups and downs." She raised her eyebrows and glanced around the room. "God knows how we afforded this house . . ."

Footsteps in the hall. A man appeared in the doorway, hesitated, froze when he saw Kelso. A thin, scowling man of fifty-five or so, with a high balding forehead, dark eyes, and a thick black mustache. The man Kelso had seen digging in the vacant lot. Kelso glanced at the man's shoes. They looked clean, but he could have changed them or cleaned them.

"Fred? This is Sergeant Kelso, from the police. It's about my jewelry. And I thought you'd forgotten to call."

Fred Barbour's face was a study in fear.

"I didn't—" he began. Then, frowning hard, "I didn't expect anyone yet."

Kelso stood up. "Mr. Barbour? I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you a few questions." It was a touchy situation. If you read them their rights too soon, they'd freeze up, say nothing. If you waited too long, whatever they said might be inadmissible.

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"Questions . . ."

"About the jewelry you buried last night in the vacant lot."

Marjorie Barbour's head jerked around and her eyes snapped at her husband. Her soft voice was suddenly taut. "Fred—what's this man talking about? There wasn't a burglary? You buried my jewelry? My family's jewelry?"

Barbour seemed on the verge of panic. His small black eyes darted left and right, the eyes of a cornered animal. His hands at his sides clenched and unclenched like agitated spiders. He scowled at Kelso.

"I'm not saying a damn thing till I call a lawyer!"

Kelso shrugged. A telephone stood on a small table near one wall. He stepped over to it, lifted the receiver, and dialed a number. Mrs. Barbour was ignoring him to glare at her husband. The phone rang on the other end and someone answered it.

"Detectives. Leill."

"Lieutenant? This is Sergeant Kelso."

"Kelso! What do *you* want?"

"I'm glad you're there today, sir. I need a warrant to search a house for some dirty shoes, some pants, and a shovel. It's about that stolen jewelry report that a Mr. Frederick Barbour made yesterday. I—"

"Kelso, what are you babbling about?" Leill sighed heavily. "It's Saturday morning. Where am I going to get a warrant? I'd have to wake up a judge, or find one out on some golf course. Shoes and a shovel? What's the matter with you?"

Barbour was edging towards the front door.

"I'll call you back, sir." Kelso replaced the receiver just as Barbour flung open the door and bolted through. Kelso hurried after him.

Outside, Susan Overstreet was coming up the sidewalk, blocking Barbour's path. Barbour paused for a second, just long enough for Kelso to reach him and lock a handcuff around one wrist. This time, there was no place to run.

"He was in debt to his ears," Kelso explained. "He was behind in his house payments, and the bank was threatening to foreclose. His shoe store was going under. Fifty thousand dollars would've saved him, at least for a while. So he pretended to discover a burglary, but he'd already taken the jewels and hidden them in his den. On Friday night he sneaked out with them and was burying them in the vacant lot when I happened to come along and hear the shoveling noises. He was waiting to call his insurance agent till he was sure the jewelry was safely buried."

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Susan Overstreet sat at her kitchen table, across from Kelso, sipping coffee.

"I still don't know why you were so sure Barbour lived in that house, before you called, I mean," she said.

"You mean about the man running away from the vacant lot? I didn't know for sure. But I knew how far ahead of me he was during the chase, and when I got to the sidewalk and suddenly there weren't any running feet to be heard I knew how far he must have gotten. It was the distance across the street to that house. Everything else was farther away."

"Very smart, unless he'd been hiding behind a tree."

"Well, he wasn't."

"So he confessed?"

"Not at first. After you left, Meyer and some uniformed cops came and we found the shovel and the dirty shoes he'd worn, and his fingerprints smeared in the dirt on the jewelry case—everything covered with dirt from the lot—and he made a full statement. Mrs. Barbour was furious, and of course now her husband's been arrested . . ."

"It's too bad," Susan said. "She sounds like such a nice lady. Maybe we should have coffee with her one day."

Kelso nodded and stood up. "Well, I'm going home for a nap. A movie tonight, and supper?"

"That'd be fine. If you can stay out of that vacant lot long enough to get here this time."

He walked down the street towards the bus stop. It was almost noon now, the sun was hot overhead, an insect buzzed his ear. When he came to the brick wall something made him turn the corner, find the iron gate, and go in.

Under the thick trees it was cool and shady and quiet. Climbing the gentle hill to the ruins of the old house, he stood gazing down into the rubble where Fred Barbour had buried his wife's sentimental treasures. Sentiment was a nice thing to have; Kelso had it about this lot, where he'd left so many memories. In a way, it was *his* lot.

He took out his pipe and a match, hesitated, then put them back in his pocket. Over the years he'd taken this place—his place—for granted, in the same way that Mrs. Barbour had taken her jewelry for granted. It was up to the sentimental, he thought, to keep things the way they should be kept.

Sighing, he stooped over and began collecting the litter and empty bottles.

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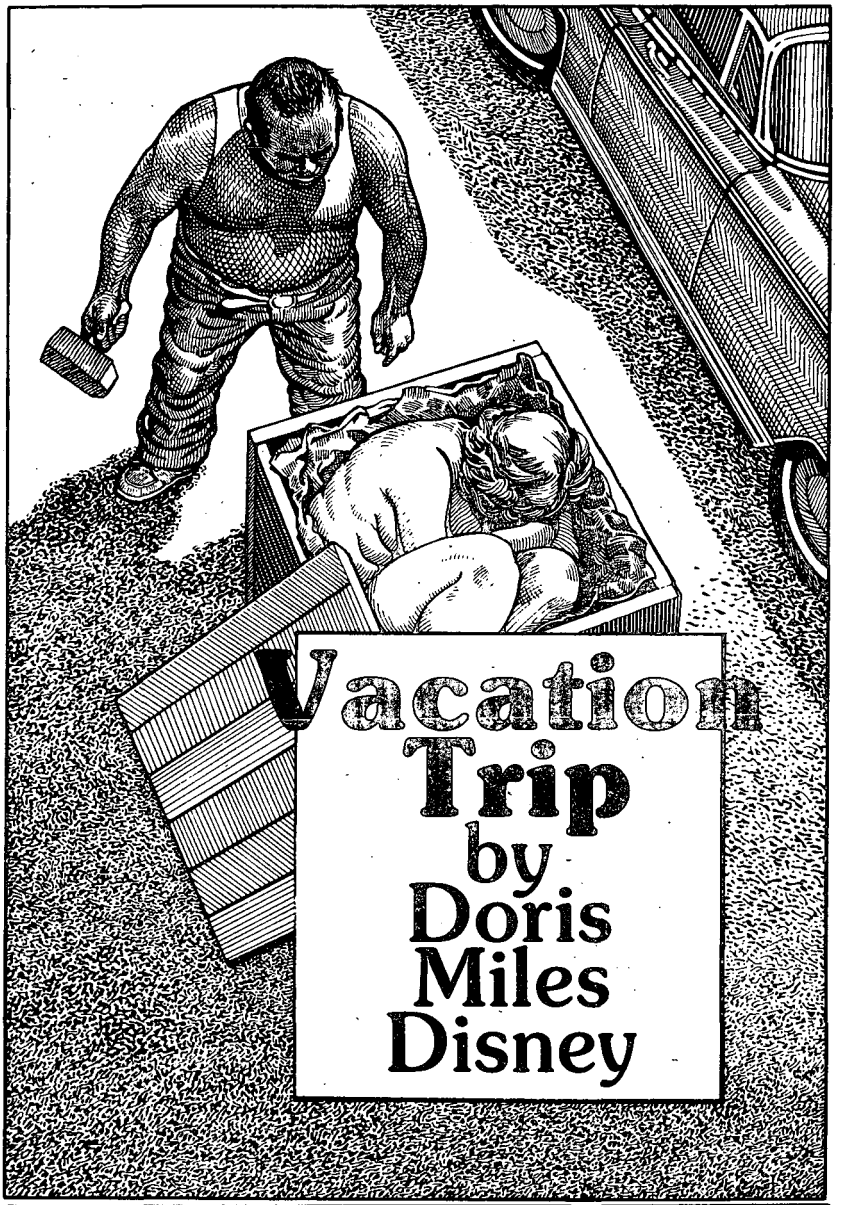
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Vacation Trip

by Doris Miles Disney

Illustration by Bob McMahon

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His hands dropped to his sides. He stood looking down at his wife. She lay still—as she should, since she was dead. He had just finished strangling her; her body had just crumpled to the floor at his feet.

He moved back a pace while his glance swept over the room. The blinds were open a little way. He wanted them closed even though the windows they covered looked out on a vacant lot; he wanted to be shut in completely with what he had done. He stepped over the body, went to the windows and closed the blinds.

His legs felt shaky. He made his way to the bed and sank down on it, turning his back on his handiwork on the floor. His hands shook, reaching for a cigarette, and he had trouble lighting it. After a few puffs on it he put it out; it burned his tongue. He hadn't realized that his mouth was parched with thirst. Even so, another minute or two went by before he could summon enough energy to get to his feet and walk the short distance to the bathroom for a drink of water.

He began to feel better after he had drunk two glasses of it. His head stopped whirling, he didn't shake as much as he had. He looked at his watch. It was three o'clock on this Friday afternoon in early August, the day his vacation began. Only twenty minutes ago he had arrived home and found his wife packed and dressed and ready to start on their trip. Well, she was still going on it—although not in the manner she had expected. . . .

Days ago he'd worked out his schedule of things to be done after the murder. He'd better get on with it, he reminded himself, moving away from the sink. First, the ice plant for dry ice, eighteen or twenty slices of it. Twenty, preferably. It wouldn't do to skimp.

He locked up the house and went out to his car.

At the ice plant he was ready with a story about a church picnic if comment was offered on the quantity of dry ice he was buying. But the uninterested clerk who cut and packed the twenty-two slices he ordered had nothing to say about it.

When he was home again, he drove his car into the garage and pulled down the overhead door. The house felt different as he entered it from the breezeway. It seemed to have taken on a deathly stillness in the short time he'd been gone, a stillness not at all like that of a house that was merely empty.

Well, why not? he asked himself with an effort at bravado. Death was in it, wasn't it? He'd murdered his wife and she lay on the bedroom floor . . .

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He went to look at her. She was right where he had left her; she hadn't, somehow, come back to life in his absence. He backed away from her with a shudder and said aloud, "The sooner I get out of here the better. Get the heebie-jeebies around here."

He was running as he headed for his workshop in the cellar.

The packing box he had built there had presented a straightforward problem in arithmetic that took in his wife's height and weight and extra inches of space for the dry ice. After he had measured the trunk of his car he had known that the lid wouldn't close on a box big enough for his purpose. But it would almost close and almost, in view of his plans, was good enough.

He put in the box the boards he had cut for the top, rolls of aluminum foil, a hammer and nails and carried it out through the cellar hatchway to the garage. The box had to go in the trunk of his car lengthwise and, just as he had foreseen, the lid of the trunk wouldn't close down over it.

He left the box where it was and lined it with aluminum foil. He had to go back in the house for rubber gloves before he could handle the dry ice. When that was in place along the sides and bottom of the box, it was ready for its occupant.

In the bedroom he worked fast removing all his wife's clothing, his head turned aside to avoid seeing her empurpled face and staring eyes. Then his gaze settled on the stocking with which he had strangled her. Could it be traced and used to identify her if anything went wrong and her body fell into the hands of the police? He untwisted the stocking that had cut a deep livid welt in her throat, wrapped her nude body in one of the bedroom rugs, picked it up and balanced it on his shoulder.

At the back door he paused to catch his breath and send a searching glance in all directions. The house was in an outlying suburb with no neighbors nearby. Now, in the midafternoon quiet, no one was in sight as he hurried across the breezeway with his burden.

A frenzy of haste assailed him when he reached the garage. For the next few minutes he was at his most vulnerable, at the mercy of any chance comer. There was no time to spare for squeamishness as he threw aside the rug and jammed the body into the packing box. For an awful moment it seemed he had miscalculated, that the box was too small. But he shoved the knees up under the chin, he pushed and he prodded and at last the body was in. He broke up the remaining slices of dry ice and filled every empty crevice with it, pressing down the leftover bits and pieces on top and cov-

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ering them with aluminum foil.

The worst was over. He reached for the nearest board, the hammer and nails.

He was a heavily built man with the surplus flesh he had acquired in middle age hampering his labors. But he didn't stop to rest from them; panting and sweating he kept on until the last nail was in place. Then he wiped his dripping face with a handkerchief, pushed the box as far back as it would go and pulled the trunk lid down over it.

It didn't need to be secured with a rope, he decided, not just for the short drive to town. He wasn't going to take it any farther than that with him. He had several hundred miles to go and state lines to cross where his car might be stopped for inspection during this, the corn borer season. Only last week, coming home from a business trip, it had happened to him and he had been asked to open his car trunk.

Police roadblocks, too, must be taken into account. Several times a year he ran into them in various parts of his sales territory. They sprang up without warning; there was no season on them, no sure safeguard against them. Even the thought of being stopped by one with the packing box in the car was too chilling to harbor.

The box was going to travel by railway express.

Back in the house he stripped off the rubber gloves in a fever of impatience to be on his way. He collected the suitcases his wife had packed, fishing tackle, a jacket and sweater and put them in the car. When he had locked the door he was ready to leave. He backed his car out of the garage, closed the garage door, and started down the driveway. It was four forty. The vacation trip had begun.

At the railway express office one of the men came out to help him carry in the box. It contained books, he said, to explain the weight.

In his role of sender he gave one fictitious name; as receiver, he used the name under which he had rented the fishing cabin. The address to which the box was sent was General Delivery in the town nearest to the lake where the cabin was located.

He didn't need to ask how long it would take for the box to reach its destination; he had found out ahead of time that it would take between two and three days.

A few minutes later he was out of the express office and headed north.

It was nearly eight o'clock before he stopped for dinner at a

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roadside restaurant. He was then a hundred miles from home and could dare to relax and drink two bourbon and sodas. Tension flowed out of him, he felt hungry and able to eat after not eating all day. Everything was working out according to plan.

Darkness came while he was at dinner. Each night of the trip he would wait for it to come before seeking a motel, and each motel he selected must have its office so situated that the proprietor wouldn't have a chance to see the empty place in the car where his wife, his ghostly vacation companion, was supposed to be seated.

That night, when he found a motel that suited him, he engaged a double room using his own name and signing Mr. and Mrs. on the registration card.

In the room he carried pretense to what he knew was an extreme, bringing in his wife's suitcase as well as his, talking aloud as if she were there, scattering a film of her face powder on the bureau and a handful of her bobby pins on the bathroom shelf.

When he went to bed he was so exhausted from his strenuous day that he fell asleep at once.

But he was awake the next morning before six, full awareness of what he had done yesterday flooding his mind instantly. It was too early to get up for his day of leisurely travel. He lit a cigarette and lay back in bed thinking about his plan, searching for weak points, for complications overlooked.

He could find none. The body was safely on its way to its destination. The lake where it would ultimately rest wasn't a vacation resort; it was an out-of-the-way place in thinly settled country. There were few cabins on it and none anywhere near the one he had rented.

He had rented it for two weeks beginning Monday. Monday morning he would reach the town, thirty miles from the lake, to which the body had been shipped. He didn't expect the express company's notice of its arrival to be at the town's post office so soon as that, but it would do no harm to inquire about it.

He checked off in his mind the other things he had to do. Pick up the key to the cabin, buy groceries, buy the materials he would need for a raft, lumber, empty oil cans to give it buoyancy, wire to fasten them to it, two or three bags of ready-mix cement, a hammer and nails—that was about it. He'd get those things, drive to the cabin, and begin building the raft right away.

By Tuesday the notice from the express office would surely be at the post office. He'd collect the box—his thoughts hurried past

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that moment, the worst still to be anticipated—and take it back to the cabin. By evening the raft would be finished and moored to the shore. He'd mix the cement—he must buy a tub or something to mix it in—and just before dark he'd drag the box out to the raft. It wouldn't take him more than a few minutes to pry the lid off and pour the cement under and over and around the body.

The cement would need six hours or so to harden, he calculated. About three the next morning he'd hitch the raft to the rowboat that went with the cabin—buy a length of rope along with the other materials—and tow it out to the middle of the lake. Push the box off the raft and his wife would lie forever at the bottom of the lake imprisoned in her cement coffin. . . .

All that would be left to do then would be to break up the raft, dispose of the oil cans, stay under cover for a day or two more at the cabin, mail the key back to the owner with some word of excuse for cutting short his stay, and the whole thing would be over. In no time he'd be miles away traveling under his own name again.

The aftermath, too, was carefully planned. He would travel toward home still registering for himself and his wife at motels and still leaving traces of feminine occupancy in the rooms he occupied. Toward the end of his vacation he would stop one night on the outskirts of some fairly large city and in the morning call his wife's one relatively close friend back home and ask if she'd heard from his wife. He'd say they'd had a serious quarrel that morning and she'd packed her suitcase and taken a bus to the city that was nearby. He was going to wait there at the motel for another night, he'd say, to see if she came back. If the friend heard from her, would she please call him at the motel?

That was how he was going to pave the way for his arrival home without his wife.

She had been the ideal murder victim, a retiring, colorless sort of person, not given to mixing with people. She'd been an only child, her parents were dead and there were no other relatives with whom she'd kept in close contact during the twenty years she'd been married to him. Because his job had entailed much moving around she'd long ago lost touch with her girlhood friends. There was no one, in fact, who would inquire too closely into her disappearance.

It was reflection on this point that had led him to contrive his plan for getting rid of her. . . .

He'd go on maintaining his present home for a few months to

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lull any least trace of suspicion. Then he'd move to some other city in his territory and file suit for the divorce that his wife, alive, would not have given him. Eventually he would be free to marry Evie, gay, cute little Evie who had lost something of her gaiety of late, crying and declaring that unless he got a divorce they'd have to break up, she just couldn't go on like this.

He'd put an end to her tears when he told her his wife had left him and he would be able to get a divorce. And when she saw the diamond engagement ring he was going to buy her, she'd scream with joy in that childlike way she had. That's all she was anyway, a child, a dear, sweet kid. She made him shed his years and feel like a kid, too, when he was with her.

Adorable little Evie, how he loved her! God knows, he was proving his love for her by what he was doing right now. But she was worth every hellish moment of it. They'd have a wonderful life together.

Thoughts of Evie heartened him. He got out of bed, shaved, showered, and dressed. It was still early, barely seven o'clock. No one saw him drive away from the motel alone.

In the next town he bought copies of all the available newspapers and scanned them page by page while he was eating breakfast. None of them carried a story about a woman's body having been found in a box. . . .

The second night of the trip he couldn't sleep. Panic overtook him as he lay picturing all kinds of things going wrong with his undertaking. The box would be sent to the wrong place; it would be smashed to bits in a train wreck. Anything and everything would happen to it. If only he hadn't let it out of his sight! If only he hadn't been so overcautious—cowardly, in fact—about taking it with him. So far he hadn't been stopped once on the road and he had but one more state line to cross. In avoiding the lesser danger he had exposed himself to a host of greater ones. Oh, if only the box were outside the door right now in the trunk of his car!

Evie didn't enter his thoughts during the long hours of that night.

He slept a little toward morning but again he was awake before six. He couldn't stay in bed, he felt as if he had to keep on the move. While he was shaving, an extra touch for proving occupancy of the room he would soon vacate occurred to him. He'd leave one of his wife's nightgowns hanging on the bathroom door for the motel proprietor to mail back to him.

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Somehow the artistry of this extra touch lightened his mood. It was almost as if it gave back life to his wife and immunity to him.

Along the road he bought newspapers—nothing in them about a box and a body—and postcards. He wrote on the postcards, "Enjoying every minute of the trip," signed his name and his wife's and mailed them to neighbors back home.

The motel where he stopped the third night of the trip was only twenty miles from his destination. He slept by fits and starts but once more he was wide awake soon after daylight pacing the floor, peering out the window to watch the sun come up, craving activity yet confined to the motel room until the world bestirred itself for the new day.

The morning newspapers, lingered over during breakfast, contained not a word about a box and a body.

At nine o'clock he reached the town that was his goal and found the business district just coming to life. He drove through it to the home of the man from whom he was renting the cabin, paid in cash the balance due on the rental and was given the key. The man talked about the good fishing at the lake, not about a body discovered at the railway express office.

He went next to the railroad station and sat in his car studying the long shedlike structure. Only a few people were around and there were only two other cars in the parking area. No blue uniforms were in sight, there were no signs of unusual activity.

He drove away from the station. At the diner where he stopped for coffee he made it a point to fall into conversation with the man who served him. He heard a great deal about local affairs but nothing about a body discovered at the railway express office. When he left the diner he was telling himself he must calm down, that nothing had happened to the box, it had already arrived safely or it would arrive safely today and all he had to do was claim it as soon as he received the notice of its arrival. His plan had been worked out so carefully that he had no cause to worry about this phase of it. The murderers who got caught were the ones who didn't plan well enough; they skipped over some small but essential detail. . . .

He went to the post office. It was scarcely possible that the notice from the express company had got there yet, but nevertheless he felt impelled to ask about it. Then he would buy groceries and the materials for the raft and go on to the lake.

At the General Delivery window his heart started pounding and

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gooseflesh broke out all over him when he saw the clerk returning to him with a card in his hand. The box had arrived. His crucial moment had caught him unawares.

He walked slowly back to his car telling himself it was all to the good. It was better to face up to it now than to endure another twenty-four hours of suspense. Then he told himself there was nothing to face up to; he was simply going to present the notice he held in his hand to the express office and claim a box of books that had been sent to him. It was a perfectly ordinary enterprise, wasn't it? There was no need for his heart to pound like this, his stomach to turn hollow at the thought of it. . . .

The express office was located at one end of the station building. A clerk behind the counter making entries in a ledger was the only person in it. He looked up and offered a cheery good morning. But when the notice was presented to him and he glanced at the name on it, his face stiffened. It was just for a moment but it was long enough to set alarm bells ringing in the other man's mind. He turned to flee but three men bearing the stamp of police, even though they weren't in uniform, blocked the doorway, and one of them had a gun in his hand.

Hours later when he had run out of denials and protests and admitted his guilt, he found out what had gone wrong with his plan.

"You used so much dry ice you turned that box into a deep freeze," the police officer said. "Then the aluminum foil did double duty. It acted as a cold conductor and it slowed down the evaporation of the ice. When the box got here last night the railway expressman wondered why it was covered all over with frost when the waybill said books. He wondered about it so much he called us in on it. You weren't so clever after all, were you? Or maybe you were just a little too clever, a little too careful. . . ."

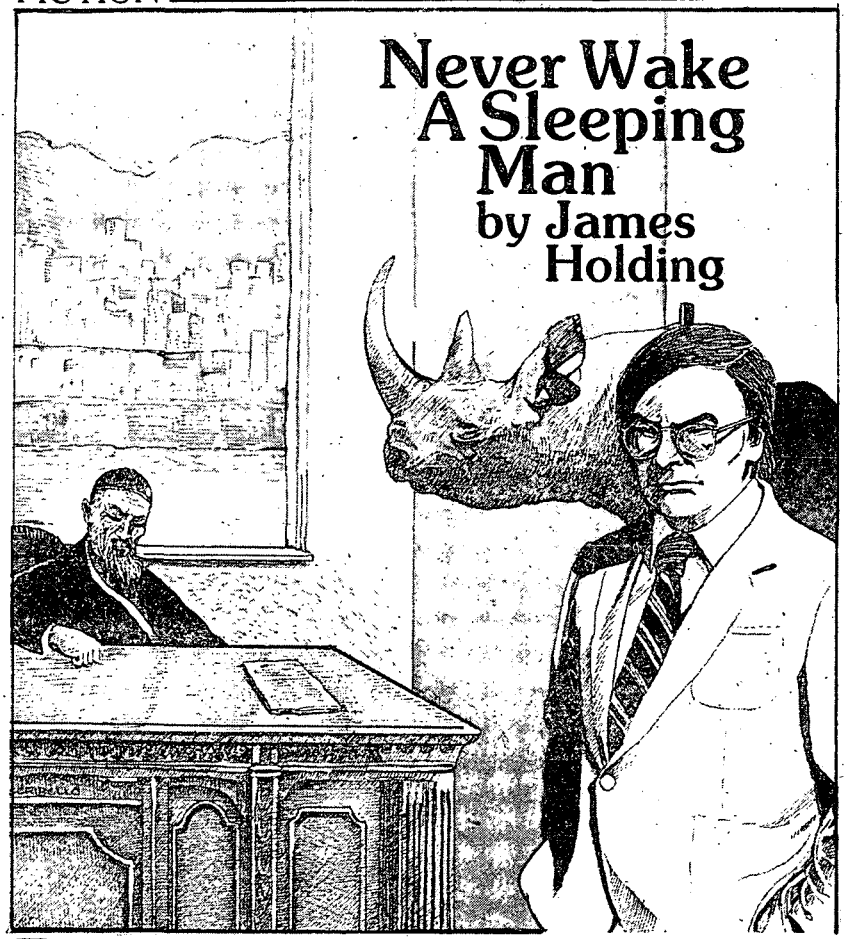
SOLUTION TO THE OCTOBER "UNSOLVED":

Bell was the killer.

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Never Wake A Sleeping Man

by James Holding



Liu Kam Fan was nodding behind his high desk when Jimmy Lee entered his office.

The old man, wizened and wrinkled as a dried-up walnut, frequently fell asleep at his desk these days, especially in the long slow hours of the afternoon. His inadvertent catnaps surprised nobody, however, since Mr. Liu, at the advanced age of seventy-six, still put in a full day's work (save for his naps) at Liu Enterprises, of which he was sole proprietor. He was also, in his own considered opinion, the only man in Hong Kong capable of managing his far-flung businesses with

Illustration by Jim Ceribello

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any guarantee of continued success.

For five seemingly endless minutes, therefore, standing upon the thick carpet beside the window, Jimmy Lee waited in fidgety silence, gazing the while through Mr. Liu's eighth floor office window. Across Victoria Bay was the bustling ant's nest of Kowloon; beyond that, the squat, distant shape of Stone Cutter's Island, barely visible now through the late afternoon haze.

Mr. Liu slumbered peacefully on, bolt upright in his leather desk chair, until at length, Jimmy Lee's impatience overcame his caution and he cleared his throat, loudly. The sound was as raucous in the quiet room as a peahen's roosting complaint.

Mr. Liu opened his eyes at once. He saw Jimmy Lee standing by the window. "Ah," he said graciously, "I apologize for ignoring your entrance, my boy. Which of my employees are you?" He fumbled with his appointment pad, searching for the name.

Mr. Liu smiled, deepening the wrinkles in his cheeks. "Have a chair, Jimmy Lee," he said. "Of course I remember you, now. You're the young man I hired to assist in computerizing my business, are you not? Graduate of the Stanford College in the U.S.A.? And . . . let me see . . . a business degree from some Ivy League place?"

"Harvard," murmured Jimmy Lee.

"Yes, Harvard. And has your computerizing gone well?"

"Great," said Jimmy Lee, who was Hong Kong Chinese born and bred but sometimes affected the speech patterns of his American college classmates. "Everything in place now and working like a charm, sir."

"So I understand." Mr. Liu stared at the wall beside his desk for a moment, lost in thought. "One misses the old ways, though, occasionally," he said at length. "Computers indeed. Quite a change from our honored abacus, eh?"

"Yes, sir. And a decided improvement. I'm sure you'll agree."

"Not a doubt of it." Mr. Liu put on a pair of steel-rimmed granny glasses and peered at Jimmy Lee over them. "So the old man was asleep when you arrived for your appointment, eh?" He shook his head, amused. "Deplorable. I apologize again. There is an ancient Arab adage on the subject, you know."

"What saying is that, sir?" What Jimmy Lee thought to himself was: "The old fool!"

" 'Never wake a sleeping man—he may be dreaming of Paradise.' " Mr. Liu smiled again. "I was not, however,

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dreaming of Paradise. I was dreaming of my youngest great-grandson, who is more like an imp from Hell. So you are forgiven for disturbing my nap, Jimmy Lee." He tapped his desk top with a gold fountain pen. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes, sir. On a matter of some importance."

"Important to whom? Liu Enterprises? Me? You?"

"With respect, sir, all three."

"Excellent," said Mr. Liu. "And which part of our business does it concern, this important matter? Let me guess, Jimmy Lee. You have conceived a new accounting procedure to make our computers even more efficient than they now are?"

"No, sir. My idea doesn't concern computers or accounting except peripherally. It concerns our only true consumer product. Heavenly Happiness Salt."

Mr. Liu's eyes lit up behind his granny glasses. "Ah!" he said. "Our consumer product, eh? A Harvard business school phrase, no doubt. Our traffic in Heavenly Happiness Salt does not go through our books, Jimmy Lee. Not our official books, at any rate." Mr. Liu laughed. "But you are familiar with it, nonetheless?"

Jimmy Lee grinned. "Of course, sir. Everybody is. The stuff is famous in Hong Kong."

Mr. Liu was complacent. "I suppose it is. And may I tell you in confidence, Jimmy Lee, that of all my business ventures, I am proudest of Heavenly Happiness Salt? It was my own invention, you know. I develped the formula, I mixed the first batch by hand, and I sold it door-to-door as a very young man." Mr. Liu reached into the side pocket of his tailor-made jacket and brought forth a small, exquisitely carved ivory box about the size of a packet of cigarettes. The sight of it made Jimmy Lee gasp despite his best effort to keep cool. A single enormous many-faceted Burma ruby was cunningly set into its lid; a double row of diamonds and sapphires—each gem over a carat in weight, by Jimmy Lee's estimate—embellished its shallow sides. "As you can see," said Mr. Liu, holding it toward Jimmy Lee in the palm of his hand, "I carry it with me always." He snapped the box open with a dramatic gesture, disclosing its amber-colored coarse-grained contents . . . an ounce or two of Heavenly Happiness Salt. "I was my own first customer," Mr. Liu went on, "and ever since (which is fifty years and more now, Jimmy Lee) I have sprinkled a pinch of it on my food at least once every day." He closed the box and set it on his desk. "Hence my perfect health, longevity, and thirty-six grandchildren!"

"An exceptional product, sir,"

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agreed Jimmy Lee sincerely, "and I believe it still has the greatest potential for growth and profit of any branch of our business."

"You do?" Mr. Liu seemed interested, Jimmy Lee thought, but not very. "You have reached that conclusion, obviously, after making a thorough study of my Heavenly Happiness Salt? You have armed yourself with all the facts about it? Its purpose, its ingredients, its sales points, its effectiveness, its distribution and sale? And, of course, its going price per ounce?" The old man's teasing was gentle and without malice.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy Lee, "I believe I have fully taken into account all those factors in shaping my . . . "

Mr. Liu interrupted. "Progress is usually achieved only through thorough knowledge," he said sententiously, "whether in business, politics, or war." He nodded solemnly in appreciation of his own wisdom. "And therefore, Jimmy Lee, may I test this thorough knowledge of yours before you propose your grand idea?"

"Certainly," smiled Jimmy Lee. The old fool!

"First then: what is the primary purpose of Heavenly Happiness Salt?"

"Implicit in its name, sir. To impart a feeling of happiness and wellbeing to all who use it."

Mr. Liu nodded approvingly. "And how is it able to provide this feeling of wellbeing to its users?"

"Because it has both curative and aphrodisiac properties, sir."

"Which brings us to its ingredients?"

"Ginseng root, salt, and rhinoceros horn," said Jimmy Lee.

"Excellent," Mr. Liu chirped. "And what are their respective functions in Heavenly Happiness Salt?"

"The ginseng root to ameliorate or cure physical ailments. The rhinoceros horn to stimulate sexual drive. The salt to lend bulk for easier packaging and to counteract the sweetish licorice taste of the ginseng root."

"You know how we acquire these disparate elements, Jimmy Lee?"

"Yes, sir. We import much of the ginseng root from Red China. The salt is ordinary table salt, obtainable at any supermarket. And we obtain our rhino horn through our wholly-owned subsidiary in Mombassa."

"Ah," said Mr. Liu, greatly enjoying this catechism. "But it is against the law to acquire rhino horn for commercial purposes in Africa nowadays, is it not? So how, I ask, does our wholly-owned subsidiary acquire it?"

"They subsidize groups of na-

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tive poachers to operate in the game preserves clandestinely, and to sell us the horns of the rhinos they slaughter." Jimmy Lee drew a deep breath and, to forestall another stupid question, said, "They grind the horn into powder in Mombassa, and smuggle the powder out to us in shipments of regular export goods such as secretly hollowed-out African wood carvings."

"You *have* done what Harvard would call your homework, haven't you, Jimmy Lee? Very well. Now then. What about the distribution of Heavenly Happiness Salt?"

"Through the chain of Houses of Heavenly Happiness you operate in Hong Kong and Taiwan."

Mr. Liu nodded, appearing quite pleased with Jimmy Lee's performance. "I named my Houses of Heavenly Happiness after my Heavenly Happiness Salt," he explained unnecessarily, "since the Salt contributed so importantly to the success of the Houses."

Mr. Liu removed his glasses and closed his eyes. Jimmy Lee thought the old man was taking another nap, but he was wrong. Mr. Liu was reliving in memory the heady triumphs of his early business career. In a moment, he opened his eyes and inquired softly, "And how about retail sales, Jimmy Lee?"

"Black market, sir. Or just as good as. On account of the illegal rhino horn ingredient, sir."

"Very good. And price per ounce on the street?"

"A hundred dollars. Hong Kong."

"That varies a bit. But you are close enough. And now, do you have any idea of our total profit on Heavenly Happiness Salt per annum?"

"No, sir," answered Jimmy Lee promptly, "but with respect, sir, it must be a hell of a lot!"

Mr. Liu smiled. "You see why I don't put my salt business through your computers," he said. "One must retain *some* little secrets, eh?" He paused to replace his glasses on his nose. "And now for the tough question. How *effective* is Heavenly Happiness Salt in fulfilling its primary purpose . . . in promoting the wellbeing of its users?"

What a stupid old relic, Jimmy Lee thought to himself. Aloud, he said earnestly, "I would suggest, sir, that the price per ounce, the unknown but probable enormous annual profit, and the continuing high revenues from your Houses of Heavenly Happiness—which *do* go through my books—are a better answer to the salt's effectiveness than any I could give you."

"Bravo!" Mr Liu tapped his palms together softly in sym-

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bolic applause. Then abruptly his manner changed. "Now then," he said brusquely, "what's this big idea of yours, Jimmy Lee?"

At last. Jimmy Lee straightened in his chair and brushed a hand nervously over his neatly combed hair. He said confidently, "As I told you, Mr. Liu, I think the potential for growth in Heavenly Happiness Salt sales is limitless. And I have worked out a tentative game plan for expanding its market into every corner of the world!"

"Goodness, that sounds interesting," said Mr. Liu in a neutral tone. "Tell me about this game plan of yours, Jimmy Lee." He underlined the words "game plan" with his voice.

"Game plan is an American football expression," began Jimmy Lee, "which means . . . "

"I am familiar with the expression," said Mr. Liu. "My number six grandson is a Dallas Cowboys fan."

"Well, yes, sure thing," said Jimmy Lee, slightly taken aback. "So what I think we ought to do with Heavenly Happiness Salt is simply this: we should adopt an overall marketing strategy that would embrace all the modern sales tools at our disposal these days, such as re-packaging, advertising, publicity, merchandising, test marketing in chosen areas, straightforward retail sales through appropriate outlets, and, of great importance, Mr. Liu, a downward adjustment in price to help us win a mass market for Heavenly Happiness Salt in place of the selective one it now enjoys. Do you see, sir? A small profit on each ounce, in favor of an infinitely greater profit on an infinitely greater number of units sold?"

Mr. Liu smiled tolerantly at his young accountant. "That's a rather grandiose game plan, isn't it, Jimmy Lee?"

"No," replied Jimmy Lee firmly, "not really, sir. It's perfectly viable."

"According to the holy word of the Harvard Business School?"

"You are treating this as a joke, sir. But I am deadly serious about it. May I continue?"

"Please do," said Mr. Liu. "Re-packaging, you say? What's your idea about that?"

"We should package our product in a specially-designed salt shaker so that our package becomes the dispenser. Various sizes, of course, containing varying amounts of Heavenly Happiness Salt. With an attractive label, typically Chinese in appearance . . . "

"What does our label say?"

"It says HEAVENLY HAPPINESS CHINESE SALT FOR GREATER HEALTH AND ENERGY. Or words to that effect."

"Any mention of *me?*"

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"Of course, MANUFACTURED BY LIU ENTERPRISES, HONG KONG."

"Good," said Mr. Liu. "Now I feel better about the new package. You list the ingredients, too?"

"Only when forced to by local laws. Otherwise, your famous brand name and the words FOR GREATER HEALTH AND ENERGY will inevitably generate increased sales."

"HEALTH standing for ginseng root and ENERGY for rhinoceros horn, is that it?"

"Exactly. Advertising and publicity will plug those same words and the same now-famous brand name, Heavenly Happiness Salt. We'll sell our salt to the masses as an exotic Chinese seasoning, which it is; as an Oriental condiment that lends a delightful piquancy to all prepared foods, in addition to promoting health and energy. You beginning to get the big picture on this now, Mr. Liu?"

Mr. Liu said, "What corner of the world have you selected for your first fling at mass-marketing my salt?"

In his excitement, Jimmy Lee pounded a fist on his thigh. "North America!"

Mr. Liu was genuinely surprised. "North America!" he exclaimed. "That seems an odd choice for a place to begin."

"It's the perfect place!" Jimmy Lee lectured. "Prospective buyers there are generally affluent. They respond to persuasive advertising quickly. They're suckers for new products. They . . . "

"Please," said Mr. Liu, interrupting, "I think you have forgotten one important factor when developing your . . . ah . . . game plan, Jimmy Lee."

"I have?" Jimmy Lee's confidence was in no way diminished by the question.

"I fear so. And it is this: Americans would never spend their money for ginseng root and rhino horn, Jimmy Lee. No matter how affluent they are. Unlike us, they have no traditional faith in the curative and aphrodisiac properties of those substances. Long since, their scientists have determined that neither ginseng root nor rhino horn is medically useful. So we should earn nothing but contempt and ridicule if we attempted to sell Heavenly Happiness Salt to them."

Jimmy Lee laughed aloud. "But Mr. Liu, I don't mean to sell Heavenly Happiness Salt to the *American* Americans! Only to the *Chinese* Americans! Surely you realize that. There are countless thousands of our people in North America, sir—in San Francisco, New York, Montreal, Texas, Mexico, you name it. And every one of them a prospective purchaser of Heavenly

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Happiness Salt."

"Oh," said Mr. Liu, hiding a smile behind a fake cough.

"Remember, sir," Jimmy Lee continued with unabated confidence, "I studied psychology at Stanford and am well aware that Chinese psychology differs substantially from that of other races. Our faith in the efficacy of ginseng root and rhino horn is so deeply rooted, so ancient, so *Chinese* that although other people have proven, as you point out, that the substances are officially useless as pharmaceuticals, *we* still believe firmly in them. And because we do believe so firmly in them, they *work* for us. They *do* cure us, they *do* excite us sexually. Am I right, sir?"

"I guess you are, Jimmy Lee. Anyway, *I* still find them effective after fifty years." He gestured toward his jewelled salt box on the desk top.

"Think of the market we have waiting for us! Malaysia, Indonesia, Europe, South Africa, even Polynesia! And Red China, too, when they have relaxed their trading policies a bit. Think of it, sir!" Jimmy Lee's eyes shone with the inner fire of a true visionary.

"Obviously," said Mr. Liu, "your plan promises ultimate riches beyond counting to Liu Enterprises and to me, personally. But what do *you* expect to get out of all this, Jimmy Lee?"

Jimmy Lee positively glowed. "I would expect you to take me in as a full partner, sir," he said, "an equal partner, in full charge of the international marketing of Heavenly Happiness Salt."

"Half the profits to me, and half to you, is that what you have in mind?"

"Yeah, man," said Jimmy Lee, resorting to enthusiastic American phrasing, "you got it now! We split the loot fifty-fifty, right down the middle! Okay, sir?"

Smiling, Mr. Liu said, "I'd like nothing better than a young smart partner like you. But as for your market-expansion plan I'm afraid my answer must be no." Mr. Liu paused. "In other words, Jimmy Lee, it is *not* okay."

Jimmy Lee came down to earth with a thump that was almost palpable. "You won't do it?" he asked incredulously.

"I *can't* do it."

"Why not?" Faint note of belligerence in Jimmy Lee's voice now.

"Because Heavenly Happiness Salt is a *dying* product, Jimmy Lee, not a *growing* one. Within a few months, I plan to withdraw Heavenly Happiness Salt entirely from the market."

"What! Why would you do a . . . a . . . suicidal thing like that?" Jimmy Lee substituted the word "suicidal" for "stupid" just in time.

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"You must have noticed that the shipments of rhino horn coming into our warehouses are getting smaller and smaller each month?"

"Of course, I've noticed. They go through my computers. So what?"

"So our supply of rhino horn, now shrunken to a trickle, will soon dry up altogether. And that is when I shall withdraw Heavenly Happiness Salt from the market." Mr. Liu sighed. "Do you see?"

"No, sir! I do *not* see! That is a mere detail! We can replace the rhino horn in our formula with zebra hoofs or cape buffalo horns, or anything else we choose. Who's to know the difference?"

"I will," said Mr. Liu firmly. "And you will. And so will every Chinese who ever used Heavenly Happiness Salt in the confident knowledge that it contains rhino horn. You, a student of psychology, shouldn't need to have me explain why."

"Nevertheless, sir, I ask you, with respect, to explain why."

"Let us use a Harvard term for it," suggested Mr. Liu mildly. "Quality control. You must maintain your product's quality or you lose your market. It's as simple as that."

"A substitute for rhino horn won't lower our product's quality!"

"Oh, but it will! For our product will lack the ingredient that our customers prize most highly."

"I still say nobody will *know* that."

"Within a week of changing our formula, everybody will know it, Jimmy Lee. You can't keep such things quiet, my boy. Not among Chinese people, anyway. Well . . ." Mr. Liu waved a dismissive hand, "everything else aside, I wouldn't permit a substitute for rhino horn anyway."

"Oh?" said Jimmy Lee.

"No. Because it would be my name and my reputation you'd be risking. I have always played fair with my customers. And by doing so, I have earned their trust and respect and good will. And those, Jimmy Lee . . . trust, respect, and good will . . .are things I fully intend to *keep*. Do you understand me?"

Jimmy Lee rose to his feet. His voice quivering with anger, frustration, contempt, he cried, "No! I do not understand you, Mr. Liu! The only thing I understand is that you have grown old and tired and smug . . . so old and tired and smug, and yes, *stupid* . . ." Jimmy Lee used the word at last . . . "that you don't recognize a brilliant merchandising plan when you hear one!"

Placatingly, Mr. Liu began, "Now, Jimmy . . . " He sighed again. "Listen to me . . . "

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"You listen to me!" Jimmy Lee cried. "As of this very moment, old man, I'm quitting my job with your out-dated, moth-eaten, stinking Liu Enterprises! If you refuse to join me, I'll carry out my merchandising plan on my own! You have no legal claim to the Heavenly Happiness Salt brand name, do you realize that? It's never been registered or copyrighted because the product is illegal, right? So I'll take your trade name and I'll use it. *I'll* manufacture Heavenly Happiness Salt in San Francisco and sell it to the world! I'll use zebra hoofs or buffalo horn or anything else I damn well please to replace rhino horn in your dumb formula! And with the Heavenly Happiness name and your precious reputation behind it, the stuff will make me a millionaire in no time! A billionaire, even!" To vent his fury and determination, Jimmy Lee aimed a kick at the chair from which he had arisen.

Not smiling now, not teasing now, Mr. Liu said slowly, "Do you really mean what you have just said, Jimmy Lee? I can't believe you do."

"You better believe it! I'm on my way, and once started, I'll never look back! I have friends in California who will back me financially, you know. So California, here I come!" Jimmy Lee paused for breath. "Do you get it now, Dad? Do you?" He turned to storm from the room.

Dad? Mr. Liu allowed him to get as far as the door. Then he said quietly, "Jimmy Lee. One moment, if you please. I have something here that I believe could change your mind about this rash action." Mr. Liu opened the middle drawer of his desk.

"Oh, yeah?" Jimmy Lee sneered. "What?" He approached the desk and was leaning forward to peer over it when Mr. Liu shot him in the face, just below his left eye.

The sound of the shot was muted, almost ladylike in tone—but Jimmy Lee was quite dead before his limp body struck the ground.

Mr. Liu replaced the small pearlhandled revolver in his desk drawer before he rose and went around the desk to look down sadly upon the young man from his accounting department.

"Forgive me, Jimmy Lee," he murmured then, "for waking you so rudely when you were dreaming of Paradise."

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MYSTERY CLASSIC

TREASURE TROVE

by F. Tennyson Jesse

Summer stayed late that year, and it was not until the last day of October that Brandon realized it had gone. Then a storm sprang up which went sweeping over the marshes, ruffling the still, grey waters of the meres and inlets, and rending the leaves from the twisted trees. After it had passed the warmth had gone from the air and only a pale, wintry sunshine lay pure and chill over the fen land. A few leaves still clung to the elms that grew about the farm place, he heard the cawing of the rooks about their nests, which showed black amid the bare branches.

Brandon felt for the moment the classic melancholy appropriate

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to the dying year, annual reminder of the autumn that approaches to every man. But the next moment, turning his head to look the way he had come, he saw that between the pale brown masses of the reeds the waters were a cold, bright blue, and the crystalline notes of the robin, practicing for its winter song, came to his ear. Beauty still lived in this fenny country and his heart responded gratefully.

He went across the muddy yard and met his friend Miles in the doorway of the farmhouse. Dear, good Miles—sun or rain, summer or winter, held very little message for him that was not strictly

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utilitarian. But Miles's ruddy, outdoor face seemed somehow to have lost its usual cheerfulness of outlook, though it would certainly not be because of anything to do with some allegorical message of the dying summer.

"Have you seen Tom and Jack?" asked Miles. "They were supposed to be ploughing in the five-acre today, and they're not to be found. They're so dependable as a rule."

"Tom and Jack? No. It doesn't matter, does it? I suppose they're harrowing or mulching or marling or sowing or some other of the many processes that you indulge in."

The strange expression on his host's face had not lightened.

"They've been queer," he said, "darn queer, for two days now, ever since they found that cursed treasure while ploughing the reclaimed piece of waste land over by the big dyke. This morning they looked so queerly at each other I didn't quite like them going out together. There's something odd about it, Bill. I don't like it."

Brandon smiled and began to stuff his pipe.

"Nonsense, what could be wrong with your men?" he said. "It won't be the first time a little bit of money has gone to a man's head. They'll get over it, you'll see."

But to himself he was thinking that it was a bit queer all the same. Everyone knew Tom and Jack; they were the famous friends of the village. Damon and Pythias weren't in it when it came to friendship. They had been to the same Council school as boys, been in the same footer team in the winter, same cricket team in the summer, skated together, gone duck shooting together, gone fishing together, fought in the same regiment through the war and had even married twin sisters, and as far as anyone knew there had never been a wry word between them. They were not men of any special ability which would have caused them to grow away from the class of life into which they had been born, but in that class they were easily first in their district. Honest, decent, intelligent men, a little slow in the processes of their thoughts, perhaps, but none the less shrewd and sound for that. Tom a year younger, slightly built and active, Jack heavy compared with his friend, but strong as a bull. Tom might be quick in his temper, but it was soon over. Jack had the serenity that often goes with men of his large build. It seemed sad and a little odd that a few dirty, antique coins should have been able to come between them.

"Why don't you tell them," he suggested to Miles, "that their old coins are probably worth very little?"

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"I have," said Miles. "But you know what these people are, they always imagine anything they dig up must be of immense value and that the British Museum would buy it for a large sum. I can understand that part of it, what I can't understand is that they should begin to quarrel over it. I should have thought they'd have been only too glad to share it, however much or little it's worth. Besides, their working hours are not over yet, and I've never known them to down tools until the right hour, generally not till after it, they're the real old fashioned kind that doesn't like to leave a job half done."

Scarcely had he said this when one of the maidservants came running from the passage at his back, calling to him in a loud and frightened voice:

"Come quick, sir, Tom and Jack be fighting in the barn, they're killing each other. . . ."

Miles turned and ran through the house, out into the front garden and across it, Brandon at his heels.

The big barn stood on the slope of the field beyond, a wooden building, black with pitch, with a red fluted roof. Beside it the straw ricks gleamed golden in the late sunshine. The two men ran up the slope of the field where the trodden turf was heavy and greasy to their feet and Brandon, out-stepping his more elderly host, burst through into the barn.

For the first moment it all seemed very dark to him, a darkness filled with dust motes that wreathed like steam in the rays shining through the doorway. The smell of cattle and trodden earth, and of the sweet stored hay, filled the dimness; rafters and rough wooden pillars stood out in the gloom. Then, as sight grew clear, his ears became aware of a horrible sound of sobbing that rose and fell, and the thud of blows. Two men were fighting, backward and forward, on the earthy floor. As Miles and Brandon sprang forward, the bigger man, who was winning, rained blows upon either side of his opponent's head, and the smaller man, from whom came the noise of sobbing, suddenly crumpled up and fell to the floor, where he lay still.

"Good God, man!" cried Miles, hanging on to the big fellow's arm. "You must be mad, you might kill him."

The man turned a ravaged face to his master.

"I shouldn't care if I had, the dirty hound!" he said. "He's a thief, that's what he is."

"Tom a thief! Nonsense. Why, you'd have fought anybody else

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who said as much."

"Aye, I *would* have," said the man, "but not now. . . . He's stolen all the money we dug up in the new field. He's hidden it away somewhere and won't say where. He's just lying and saying he hasn't got it."

Brandon had knelt down beside the unconscious Tom, whose face was running with blood; now he looked up and said:

"Well, you've nearly killed him. Even if it's true, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and I don't believe it *is* true, Tom wouldn't do a thing like that. By God, Miles, look at his fists. Open your fists."

And he got up and advanced on Jack, who stood staring sullenly at him, his clenched fists still held before him. Jack offered no resistance as his master and Brandon pulled his fingers apart and discovered, clenched in each hand, a ragged flint stone, the ends dripping with Tom's blood. Brandon, looking at Jack's glazed eyes, said nothing; it would be little use saying anything, he felt, to a man as changed from the self they all knew as this man was. Instead, he said to Miles:

"We must get Tom out of this, you and Jack pick him up while I have a look around."

With surprising docility Jack bent down and picked up gently the head he had ill treated, and he and Miles between them carried the unconscious man out through the ray of sunlight into the air.

Brandon sat down on an upturned bucket near at hand, he felt sick and ill at the sight of the blood, an idiosyncrasy of his, so unconquerable that he had ceased to be ashamed of it. It seemed to him that the dim air of the barn was laden still with the violent passions that had been released there, that the element of strangeness in this sudden hatred sickened the very sunlight that slanted in upon the spot trodden by the men's struggling feet.

Brandon was not normally a super-sensitive man, but all his life he had been the prey of moments which had taken and shaken him oddly, moments when he had seemed not through any superior gifts of his own, but because of some outer compulsion, to be aware of more than most men, of more than, ordinarily, he would have been aware of himself. Usually these strange spaces of clarity were prefaced by an unaccountable aspect of external things; a familiar tree or bookshelf would take on a look that he could only describe to himself as "tilted," as though the angle of the visible world had started off in a new direction, pointing toward an unknown di-

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mension; as though the tree or bookshelf had lost, all of a sudden, its treeness or furniturehood, and become a wedge thrust into space. At the time this would seem all right to him, only afterwards, looking back, his senses still giddy, he would realize the different tilt. And, cutting across this new space, there would come a wedge of light, tilted at the same new angle, which for the moment was the right angle, and in it he would be aware of, rather than see, a new and more complete aspect of something he had only imperfectly known before. A friend's motive for doing what had to him previously seemed inexplicable; the solution to some riddle in the history lecture he was working out; or sometimes even a fresh light upon a matter which had no earthly connection, as far as he knew, with himself.

He was almost hypnotized into this feeling now, as he sat there in the barn, but he shook off the dizzying sensation, like the familiar pins and needles of the children, that was stealing over him, and told himself it was due to the upset of his nerves and to the angle of the shaft of light that streamed in at the door. He got to his feet and as he did so he caught sight of a battered felt hat lying against the wall of the barn. He went over to it to take it up, he recognized it as Tom's by its peculiar light grey color and by the bluejay's feather stuck in the band. He bent to pick it up, but to his surprise it was so unexpectedly heavy in his hand that he almost dropped it. He ran his fingers behind the head lining of the crown; wrapped in a thin piece of stuff he felt the uneven surfaces of coins. So Tom had lied after all . . . he had concealed the coins. Brandon felt as when he had seen the flints concealed in Jack's fists.

He picked up the hat, and went heavily out of the barn with the hat carried between his two hands. He crossed the garden and went into the little room outside the front door which Miles used as his office.

Brandon closed the door and sat down at the table, pushing away papers and ledgers to make a clear space in front of him. Then he turned the hat up, and pulled out the pack of coins which lay, snake-like, curled round the crown. He unfolded the strip of soiled silk handkerchief and poured the coins out on to the table before him. There they lay, the source of all the trouble between Tom and Jack, a mere handful of dirty, almost shapeless coins. Brandon looked at them curiously. They were so old and battered he could only just make out the head of a Caesar—which, he knew not, but

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the Roman look of it was unmistakable. It seemed incredible that through these coins, the passion of envy, mounting murder high, had come into being. . . . He scraped the coins together in his two hands.

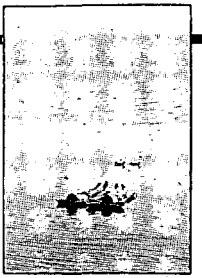
And then, as he sat there, the strange sensation came flooding over him, drenching him, as it were, to the tips of his fingers and toes, so that he felt he could not move if the house caught fire about him. He felt very cold, in spite of the tingling that pervaded him, and he knew—how, he could not have told—that he was holding in his palms things so evil that his very flesh revolted, things so evil that whenever they were discovered and rediscovered by men they brought evil in their train. He knew, with a dreadful clearness in the midst of this dark red mist, that these things had been turned up by the ploughshare, or dragged from the sea, or cast upon beaches throughout the years, and whosoever found them knew desolation and decay of everything that had been his until then. There beat at him persistently the knowledge that he must take these things out and throw them away in the place where it was least likely they would be found for generations to come. He must weight them heavily and cast them out to sea, or throw them into the still waters of some disused pit.

He struggled violently against the feeling of horror that held him, because he wished to see about this business as soon as might be, and by a violent effort of the will he pulled himself back into the present. The evening sun was still shining into the little room. Shaking, but with the tingling slowly growing less all over his body, he drew his hands away from the clustering coins and let them fall upon the table. He passed his palm across his wet forehead and told himself that in another moment or so he would be able to do what he had to do, and quite soon he stood up, his steady self again, although not denying he had been shaken.

It was suddenly that the dreadful idea took him. Putting out his hand he bgan to count the coins; he counted three times, always hoping that in his hurry he might have erred, but count as he would, the battered pieces of silver numbered thirty. Brandon leaped up, and drew away from the table, his hands shaking. He found himself saying in a dreadful whisper: "Thirty pieces of silver . . . thirty pieces . . . of silver."

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THE STORY THAT WON



Cartier-Bresson/Magnum

The July Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Tim Michaels of Morganton, North Carolina. Honorable mentions go to Anita McBride of Orland Park, Illinois; Paula D. Berta of Jacksonville, Florida; Rod McCaslin of Annapolis, Maryland; David K. Harford of Bradford, Pennsylvania; Scott Bishop of Adrian, Michigan; Eva Maria Fleck of Olney, Maryland; C. B. Andreasen of Westminster, Maryland; Robert Gray of Rutland, Vermont; and Penny W. Berk of Seattle, Washington.

FISHING FOR CLUES by Tim Michaels

Two years of college, two more at the academy, another six months on-the-job training, and for what? Watching suspected drug dealers float on water? Real detective stuff, huh?

My boss, Chief Detective McIntosh, is a very observant old coot—doesn't miss a trick. "They'll make their move," he says. "Just takes time." Anyway, back to the guys on floats. They hop off and swim a while, then get back on—nothing unusual. About twenty minutes pass and they head for shore, unsuspecting of the two bored fishermen who also happen to uphold the law.

"Nothing here," I say to the chief. "Back to the old drawing board." To my surprise, the chief tells the line sergeant, "Book 'em." They're actually going to be arrested. "Hey, what the . . ." "You're not very observant, kid," the chief interrupts. "You saw exactly what I saw, right? You saw the two floats were exactly alike. You also saw both men get off their floats and swim, correct?" Ready to argue and make the old pro admit defeat, I open my mouth. Suddenly, the line sergeant and his men bring their prisoners in. As the guilty verbalize their protest, the chief kneels and with a knife, slashes both floats. Inside one are plastic bags full of a familiar white substance; the other holds stacks of neatly-wrapped one-hundred-dollar bills. Looking up, trying not to grin, the chief says, "What you didn't notice, kid, was that these two clever coke dealers traded floats."

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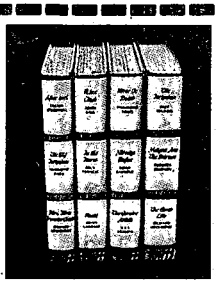
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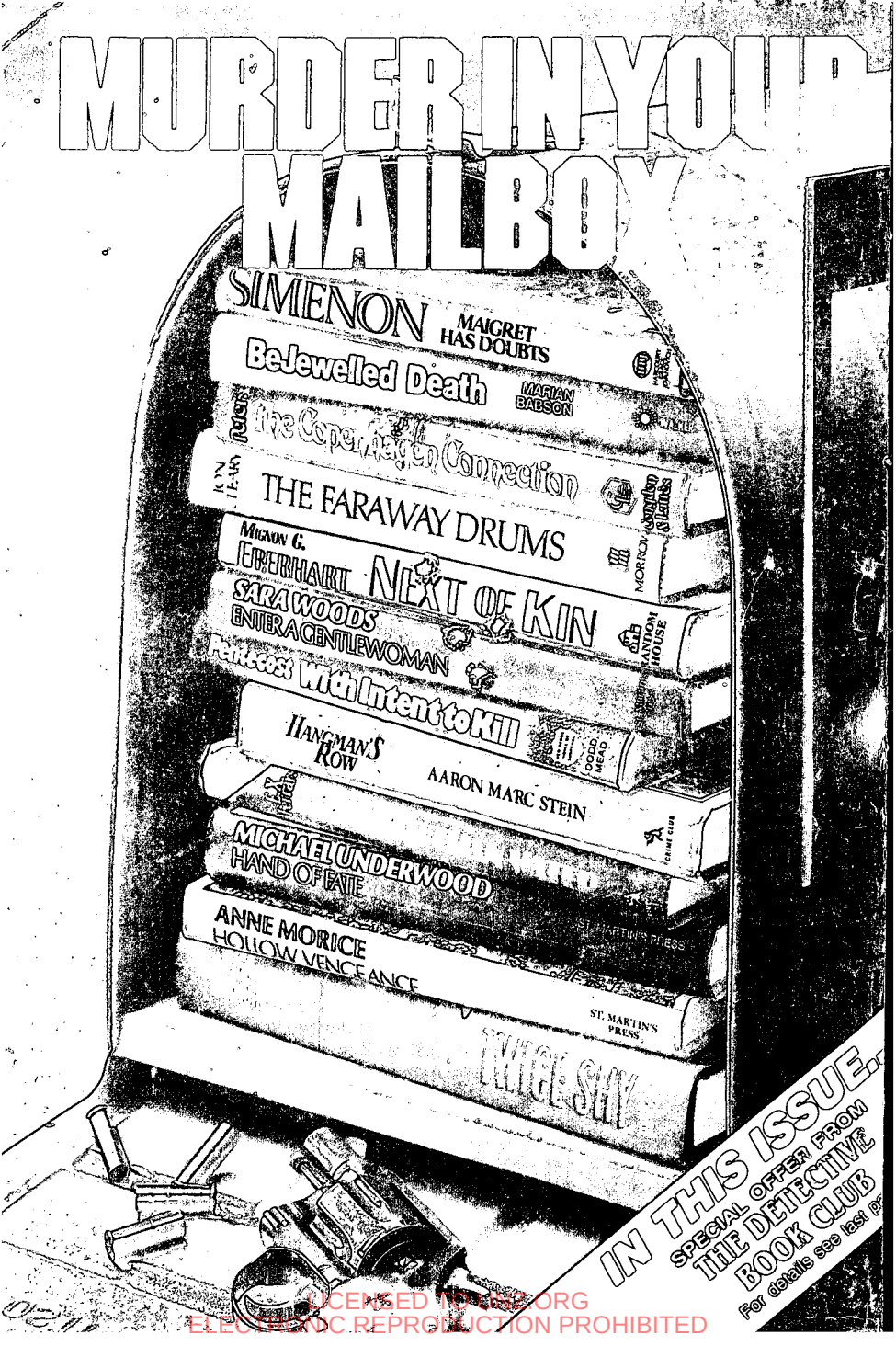
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